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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

COMEDY AND THE COMIC ANTAGONIST:
BLOCKING CHARACTERS IN SHAKESPEARE'S COMEDIES

by

FRANK KOOISTRA ©

A THESIS

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Date . May 27, 1989 .

To my parents

Abstract

The nature and function of blocking characters changes through the sixteen plays in Shakespeare's comic canon. The early comedies, up to and including A Midsummer Night's Dream, display comic antagonists whose behavior is dominated by plot or theme: Shylock and Katharine Minolta, the most famous of Shakespeare's blocking characters, act according to the stereotypes of the kind of comedy in which they exist. Their thematic abstraction has led to critical controversy about the humanity of these characters.

In the middle comedies (c. 1596-1601), the function of the blocking characters changes. They are usually less of a threat to their comic worlds than their early comedy counterparts such as the *senex iratus*. Because they exist in the serenity of happy escapist worlds, whose tone is determined by the heroines of the plays, the blocking characters pose less of a threat to comic happiness there than the blockers of the early comedies. Even Malvolio acts as a lightning rod to attract all the comic antagonism of Twelfth Night, and his gulling leaves the play sweeter after his comic banishment.

In the problem comedies, All's Well That Ends Well and Measure for Measure, specific blocking characters are replaced by a general floating comic antagonism, reflected in the irreconcilable differences of the protagonists. Exposure of identifiable comic antagonists (such as

Parolles) is not enough to free these plays from a darkening tone and comic irreconcilabilities.

The Romances subsume comic antagonism into a new kind, the "self-blocking" character, who creates inward blocks to comic happiness and only finds reconciliation through repentance-producing illusions. Shakespeare leaves behind readily identifiable blocking characters of the early comedies for the more difficult problems of mingled good and evil, reality and illusion, in his later comic protagonists.

Comic values of love and sympathy also form a background in Shakespeare's five major tragedies where he defines comic commitment and even more, tragic action, by means of comic characters and values (witnessed in his ubiquitous clown population) and by the anti-tragic natures of the heroines. Comic values form the basis of comic action in the comedies, tragicomic reconciliation in the romances, and a subversive comic matrix to tragic action in the tragedies. Comic values, whether in tragedy or comedy, emerge with the antagonists who oppose the main action of their plays.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER PAGE

I. Introduction: The Continuum of Shakespeare's Comic Antagonists and their Comic Worlds 1

II. Age and Crabbed Youth: The _Senex_ in Shakespearean Comedy 30

III. Real and Imaginary Blocks: In the Service of Love: A Comparison of _The Taming of the Shrew_ and _The Merchant of Venice_ 68

IV. The Middle Comedies: The Comic Antagonist from Social Climber to Shadow 95

V. The Problem of Determining a Villain: Finding the Comic Antagonist in _All's Well that Ends Well_ and _Measure for Measure_ 122

VI. The Hero Beleaguered: Romance Structure in _Pericles_ and _Cymbeline_ 150

VII. _The Winter's Tale_ and _The Tempest_: Mortality Accepted 175

VIII. Tragedy and the Comic Matrix: Comedy and the Feminine in the Tragedies 224

Works Cited 286

I. Introduction

The Continuum of Shakespeare's Comic Antagonists and their Comic Worlds

Certain characters in Shakespeare's sixteen comedies function as "blocking characters," a definition first put forward by Northrop Frye. According to Frye, all comedy plots follow the same pattern. Young love is resisted by some opposition, usually the father, or "someone who partakes of the father's closer relation to established society," a rival with "less youth and more money." The rival can be a miles gloriosus, or foppish, or elderly; the main point, however, is that in most comedies the blocking characters are the most memorable. If the comic hero's character "has the neutrality that enables him to represent a wish-fulfillment" the comic blocking character often has the behaviour traits that make comedy interesting.[1] But the definition Frye invents to describe the blocking characters for comedy in general does not fully describe the comic antagonists of Shakespeare.

The purpose of this thesis will be to deepen and extend the definition of "blocking character," in fact, gradually and perceptibly to change the definition for a better descriptive term, that of "comic antagonist" in place of it. "Comic antagonist" describes the on-going relationship between the character or characters in conflict with the

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[1] Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 163-7.

Shakespearean comic world they inhabit, and allows us the latitude to include in it the comic antagonists of the Problem Plays and the Romances, characters who differ from the usual "blocking characters" by being the protagonists and sometimes even the heroes of their own comedies. Shakespeare often dispenses with the usual blocking types early on in his comedies, preferring emotional and spiritual complications, plot confusions, and even ideological clashes between the comic antagonist and his comic world to the usual psychological bondage of repetitive behaviour patterns in the blocking characters of other comic drama.

Unlike the blocking characters of Shakespeare's dramatic rivals, Shakespearean comic antagonists are not always true to type, not always eccentric or ridiculous. They do not always speak greed or parsimony or boastfulness or folly as do Middleton's or Jonson's comic blocking characters. When they do so, however, they are indelible examples of human eccentricity. No other blocking characters have the eternal antagonistic currency of Shylock or Malvolio, though Malvolio is slightly less complicated, and far funnier as a defeated comic antagonist than Shylock. When Shakespeare wants to create a blocking character with all the extravagant behaviour patterns of a Jonsonian blocking character, he can do so easily, for example, Ancient Pistol. This line of reasoning leads one to the conclusion that Shakespeare, even though he mastered comic satire, did not often choose to cast his comic blocking characters in a satirical light. Instead, he found some saving grace in most of his blocking characters, something which would give the reader cause for sympathy towards them. This creates critical difficulties when the critic looks for comic scapegoats.

Comic antagonism in Shakespeare is not always the result of stock character traits in a stock comic character. In Jonsonian comedy, once the plot or con-game is discovered to the audience, the comic antagonism disappears along with the fictional reality of the comic antagonist. In Shakespeare, on the other hand, the conflict between the comic antagonist and his world persists after the play has been read, existing as a kind of continuum which the comic resolution does not always make disappear.

Frye lists other blocks or complications in comedy: "absurd, cruel, or unnatural law[s]," and compacts or "conspiracies formed by the hero's society" or ordeals.[2] Bassanio's ordeal "is to make a judgement on the worth of metals."[3] Frye also lists "oaths" such as Navarre's oath to exclude women from his academy for three years. These "blocks" are not so much characters as they are personifications of the characters' obstructing power:

> At the beginning of the play the obstructing

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[2] Frye, p. 166.

[3] Frye, p. 166.

> characters are in charge of the play's society, and the audience recognizes that they are usurpers. At the end of the play the device in the plot that brings hero and heroine together causes a new society to crystallize around the hero, and the moment when this crystallization occurs is the point of resolution in the action, the comic discovery, anagnorisis or cognitio.[4]

In Shakespearean comedy the point of resolution in the action of Shakespeare's earlier comedies becomes the point at which the power of the blocking characters, either as obvious blocking characters or more generalized obstructions which are diffused into the structure of the society which is opposed to the comic heroes and heroine's wishes, has been evaded or beaten. Resolution to the action varies considerably, but generally it is put off until the last act in Shakespeare's earliest comedies (The Comedy of Errors, The Two Gentlemen of Verona), advanced towards the middle of his slightly later comedies (especially The Merchant of Venice and The Taming of the Shrew) and advanced a little more in Shakespeare's "green world" comedies (A Midsummer Night's Dream, As You Like It). In these comedies and most of the ones in between, there are obvious blocking characters to be defeated, or, as in the case of Shakespeare's two or three earliest comedies, the plot action resolves the obstructions to the romantic protagonists' desires. Twelfth Night is a return to the early play's dependence on plot action for a resolution of comic obstructions.

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[4] Frye, p. 163

In the Problem Comedies and the Romances the obstacles to comic resolution are often the comic protagonists themselves. The obstacles to comic resolution are not so much blocking characters as anti-comedic forces: general attitudes and ways of life in the background of the plays which are opposed to the wishes of the heroines. Male comic protagonists have to be educated out of the prevailing attitudes of their plays, or at least the process of education has to have begun before they can be paired off with the romantic heroines.

Regardless of the inevitable resolution of comic difficulties and the happy ending that a comedy plot implies, Frye makes the crucial point that comedy represents life "the way things are" rather than the way things have to be, which is the ending in tragedy.[5] An equally rigid plot structure, that is, a plot structure which demands life where tragedy demands death, binds itself to a general conviction that comedy reflects life the way it normally works. Comedy implies an open-ended structure and a continuity of life which seems everlasting: the ending marriages in comedy are the eternal new start.[6] If we accept the death of the tragic protagonist grudgingly (and

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[5] Frye, p. 167.

[6] Susan Snyder, The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, "Introduction," pp. 3-14.

Aristotle's catharsis of pity and fear suggests we do), we willingly accept comedy's ending.

The comic ending in Elizabethan comedy finds validation in religious ceremony. We learn from Francis Cornford and others, including Sir James Frazer and Jessie L. Weston, that comedy had its start and is grounded in Greek fertility rituals older than recorded history. Frye traces the course of Christian literature in the festivals and holy days of the Christian calendar, which is indeed the dominating metaphor of the Anatomy of Criticism, ordered as it is around the four seasons and the twelve months of the Christian year. The most important religious ceremony in Shakespearean comedy is the wedding ceremony, since that determines the end of fifteen of the sixteen comedies, excluding only Love's Labor's Lost. The written form of it Shakespeare would have known is "The Forme of Solemnization of Matrimonie" in The Book of Common Prayer, 1547. I include this book in the introduction to my dissertation because it figures importantly in determining the particular nature of the antagonism between a "comic antagonist" or blocking character and the comic world he inhabits in more than a few of Shakespeare's plays, including his tragedies.

When man enters into matrimony, he enters into "an honorable estate instituted of God in paradise, in the time of man's innocencie, signifying unto us the misticall union that is between Christ and his church."[7] What is true for man is true for woman too: comic heroines in Shakespearean comedy are equal partners in the state of innocence. Shakespeare went far in establishing the moral and spiritual equality of women in his drama, in both comedy and tragedy. Milton, of course, is Shakespeare's successor in establishing women as partners with men in the state of innocence.

Shakespeare's blocking characters are often out of line with the "excellent mystery" that marriage represents.[8] They are either reluctant, or too willing, for reasons of their own, to enter into the union which reflects the "mysticall union that is between Christ and his church"[9] and which forms the plot resolution of virtually all English comedy. What the marriage ceremony represents spiritually Frye extends to the form and function of comedy. The marriage ceremony gives more spiritual significance to the endings of comedy than to the ending of tragedy although, surprisingly, the places where Shakespearean characters refer to themselves as bridegrooms occur in the tragedies. In Act IV, vi in King Lear, Lear says he will "die bravely,/ Like a smug bridegroom." In Act IV, xiv, of Antony and Cleopatra,

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[7] "The Forme of Matrimonie," The Book of Common Prayer, 1547. No publishing information or page numbers given. Special Collections, The University of Alberta Library.

[8] "The Forme of Matrimonie."

[9] "The Forme of Matrimonie."

Antony prepares for his suicide by saying "But I will be a bridegroom in my death, and run into't/ As to a lover's bed"; and in Act III,iv, in Othello, Othello implies he is a bridegroom when he warns Desdemona about the strawberry-patterned handkerchief given to him by his mother: "She dying, gave it me/ And bid me when my fate would have me wive,/ To give it her [his wife]." Lear's use of the metaphor of bridegroom floats up from his madness, Antony puts a brave face on his despair, and Othello gathers evidence for his wife's ritual slaying. All are actions which are far removed from the pragmatic happiness of a festive comic marriage, but all exploit the pathos, or perhaps the absurdity, of the tragic situation in relation to lasting marriage, which tragedy does not permit.

"Bridegroom," of course, is the word Jesus gave to himself in Matthew 9:15 and John 3:29. Both Biblical passages anticipate festivity and joy; John even refers to himself as the best man at the wedding between Christ and his bride, the church. Sacrifice is a part of the covenant established between humanity and the creator, so Shakespeare found the bridegroom metaphor appropriate for tragedy. Yet in the Anatomy of Criticism, Frye finds comedy to be the final product of drama.

> Christianity, too, sees tragedy as an episode in the divine comedy, the larger scheme of redemption and resurrection. The sense of tragedy as a prelude to comedy seems almost inseparable

from anything explicitly Christian.[10]

Thus tragedy is only the first stage in any "complete" Christian drama: comedy is the inevitable result, and what tragedy will work itself around to. We do not have to agree with Frye, but we can turn to the final products of Shakespeare's dramatic career, The Romances, for proof that he also thought tragedy could eventually turn into comedy. Frye's contention is well-grounded in evidence from Shakespeare's canon. What is true for tragedy seems less true for Shakespeare's comic antagonists, however. If Shakespeare's tragic protagonists are defeated by something larger, more impersonal, and beyond their individual fates, then they are only responsible for what happens to them up to the point where the impersonality of tragedy takes over. The same cannot be said for Shakespeare's comic antagonists, who are a part of, and in a complicated way, judged by the comic world they inhabit. The death of the tragic protagonist is judgement enough; all the evaluations which a comic society makes of a "comic antagonist" are transcended in tragedy by the tragic purpose on the one hand, and the impersonality of his tragic fate on the other hand, of the tragic protagonist. If we see tragedy from a Christian viewpoint, however, comedy is the final step in the Christian scheme of things, and the death of the tragic protagonist is only a prelude to the eternal comic order brought about by his death.

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[10] Frye, p. 215.

The blocking characters Frye catalogues in the Anatomy of Criticism are usurpers, characters who in increasingly subtle ways assume they have certain rights in the comic plot, as opposed to tragic protagonists who take over tragic plots. The bridegroom metaphor in tragedy implies a union or reunion beyond the horizon of the tragic spectator's perspective, something better than the sacrifice and ending in death tragedy offers. Comic blockers, on the other hand, never find an identity outside of their individual comedies because Shakespeare works on the assumption that the comic community is usually right in its judgement of irreconcilable characters, and most certainly right in its judgement of reconcilable characters.

Other minor characters Frye lists are the Vice, who "acts from pure love of mischief, and can set an action going with a minimum of motivation" (Matthew Merrygreek in Ralph Roister Doister, Iago in Othello); the tricky slave, "the type entrusted with matching the schemes which bring about the hero's victory" (the Dromios of Comedy of Errors, Tranio in The Taming of the Shrew, Ariel in The Tempest), the "architectus," who controls the consequences of the actions in the comic plot (Vincentio in Measure for Measure and Prospero in The Tempest), and Shakespeare's clown population, which includes buffoons "whose function it is to increase the mood of festivity rather than contribute to the plot."[11] Only the vice could be considered a blocking character; the others further the plot.

Frye underestimates the importance of Shakespeare's clown population who, in their puns and word-play and non-intervention in the plot do much more than increase festivity. They form part of the nurturing principle of comedy and show humility and appreciation of the life they help to celebrate.

> Renaissance comedy, unlike Roman comedy, had a great variety of such characters, professional fools, clowns, pages, singers, and incidental characters with established comic habits like malapropism or foreign accents.[12]

Sidney's Defense of Poetry (1579-80) also mentions buffoon types but in a context of disapproval for the contemporary habit of mixing the serious and the comic in the same scenes. Sidney did not think the serious and the comic belonged in a work which maintained a serious tone, yet he often mixed the serious and the ludicrous, as far as details are concerned, in the Old Arcadia. The purity of genre he set forth in the Defense is one we are likely to think he himself would have violated if he had lived to witness the growth of "mixed" drama in the late 1580's and beyond.

The puns and word-play of Shakespeare's clown population provide an easy-going drift to the comic action; Elbow and Dogberry's dialogues are wonderful in their ability to turn away our attention from rather serious comic complications to the natural unfolding of ordinary talk, to the fuddlement and irrelevances that characterize talk with no particular rhetorical purposes to it. In Shakespeare, the clowns are more than comic relief in language; they are also the comic matrix itself, the life of the ordinary as it is reflected in a specialized "ordinary" language, a paradox of language which infallibly brings about the right effect in Shakespearean comedy.

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[11] Frye, p. 175.

[12] Frye, p. 175.

The significance of Frye's anatomy of comedy is precisely that: he breaks down comedy into its components, and also diagrams the immemorial comic assumptions which recombine these component parts into the particular Shakespearean comic form: a busy, usually less than noble world of characters pursuing everyday concerns, a plot centered on a pair of young lovers and their allies, and a happy ending which defeats the opposition of the blocking characters, fulfills the desires of the young lovers, and tries to reconcile everyone to everyone else. Frye explains to us the engine of comedy, and like a mechanic teaches us all the different parts of the engine: comedy itself, though, does not reveal its mysteries to the theoretician; all we know, as Wimsatt says, is that comedy works.[13]

I propose the thesis that blocking characters in

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[13] W.K. Wimsatt, The Idea of Comedy: Essays in Prose and Verse: Ben Jonson to George Meredith, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969, pp. 1-21.

Shakespeare form a particular group of comic antagonists, and that the comic world they inhabit has to be studied in detail to understand the nature of the comic antagonism they represent. There have to be reasons particular to each comedy to explain the banishment or reconciliation of blocking characters. Thus the study becomes reciprocal: when one examines in detail why some characters are difficult to reconcile to their comic world, one can better understand the whole comedy and the most important concerns of it. To do this, I have had to use criticism of Shakespearean comedy in an eclectic way. The most important critics have proved the most useful simply because they are the most sensitive to Shakespearean comedy, so I have chosen what seemed relevant and discarded the rest. No other major critic discusses blocking characters as such, or at the length Frye does. Therefore, most of the criticism has been on the periphery of my thesis, but all that I list has been helpful, not necessarily for its own critical argument, but for the insights it has provided along the way.

John Dover Wilson's Life in Shakespeare's England (1926), E.M.W. Tillyard's The Elizabethan World Picture (1943), Marchette Chute's Shakespeare of London (1949), Leslie Hotson's The First Night of Twelfth Night (1954), A.L. Rowse's William Shakespeare: A Biography (1963), and S. Schoenbaum's Shakespeare's Lives (1970) have all helped to place Shakespeare in the context of his own age. Willard

Farnham's The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy (1936), Glynn Wickham's Shakespeare's Dramatic Heritage (1969), M.C. Bradbrook's Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy (1935), and the counterpart to that in comedy, The Growth and Structure of Elizabethan Comedy (1955) show how comedy and tragedy have common roots in the growth of the English drama out of medieval church liturgy, and all of the above books are helpful in tracing the branching of the various kinds of drama in both genres. Two more specialized books are Fredson Bowers' Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy (1940), and G.K. Hunter's The Humanist as Courtier (1963). Bowers traces tragedy to its grim beginnings in English obsession with revenge, an interesting if untenable thesis, and Hunter gives a good picture of a different kind of Latinate comedy played by Paul's boys company, one which was recitative and formal. Hunter also gives a good picture of the uncertainty of court-life during Elizabeth's reign. Another interesting and helpful study is Bernard Spivack's Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil (1957), which traces the Renaissance villain back to the Vice-figure in Medieval morality plays.

Several works of criticism which have helped to set out the parameters of philosophical theorizing about comedy are Albert Cook's The Dark Voyage and the Golden Mean (1949), Robert W. Corrigan's Comedy: Meaning and Form (1965), an anthology of critical essays on comedy, the Penguin Classics translation of Aristotle's theory of comedy in Aristotle, Horace, Longinus: Classical Literary Criticism (1967), and an anthology of English theorists, W.K.Wimsatt's The Idea of Comedy: Essays in Prose and Verse: Ben Jonson to George Meredith, (1969). A study of the theories of comedy, from the missing explanation by Socrates on the unity of tragedy and comedy in The Symposium to Susanne Langer's Feeling and Form (1953) is essential for getting a perspective on comedy as a genre and a way of classifying particular comedies.

Four articles which have classified something of the nature of Shakespearean comedy in particular are Northrop Frye's "The Argument of Comedy," in English Institute Essays (1949), Nevill Coghill's "The Basis of Shakespearean Comedy" (1950), E.M.W. Tillyard's The Nature of Comedy and Shakespeare (1958), and Helen Gardner's "As You Like It" (1967). Frye's article is the preliminary study which led to his work on comedy in The Anatomy of Criticism (1957), setting out the components of comedy as Aristotle did for tragedy. The other three articles pay admiring tribute to the Christian ethic in Shakespeare's comedies, where love and charitable feelings predominate. Professor Gardner's essay is nearly as charming as the play she writes about (As You Like It), and Coghill and Tillyard pay their tributes to the comedies in general. All four articles have strengthened my already quite strong conviction that Shakespeare's plays are implicit with New Testament sentiments.

Three books which help to put Shakespeare' comedies in a feminist perspective are Juliet Dusinberre, Shakespeare and the Nature of Women (1975), The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare (1980), and Linda Woodbridge, Women and the English Renaissance (1984). Dusinberre's book has been especially valuable in establishing the Puritan foundation for spiritual equality of women in marriage, which in turn leads to more tangible forms of equality, such as intellectual and financial independence. Woodbridge's book is valuable for its setting out of the anti-feminist controversy in English literature, especially during the Renaissance. Several anthropological-sociological studies illuminating some of the basic structure of Shakespearean comedy and the social practices which shaped that structure include C.L. Barber's "The Saturnalian Pattern in Shakespeare's Comedy" (1951), Marjorie Garber's Coming of Age in Shakespeare (1981), and Edward Berry's Shakespeare's Comic Rites (1984). Berry's book follows Garber's thesis of life crises and stages divided into three major phases, "separation," "transition," and "incorporation," phases which apply to each stage in a comic character's maturity. Berry applies Garber's identification of the adolescent "liminal" period to the Elizabethan custom of training young men of the upper classes in universities, service abroad, or apprenticeships and tutoring girls or training them in domestic service. He sees this social practice as a metaphor which is reflected in the "green world" or "holiday" Frye and Barber place at the center of Shakespeare's middle comedies. Garber's book sets out the maturing process of various Shakespearean characters. Her most illuminating thoughts concern the "liminal" state of Shakespeare's comic protagonists, especially the male characters. She puts a Freudian emphasis on verbalizing desire and asserting identity, which also works well for Coriolanus and the Problem comedy Measure for Measure. Barber's article is incorporated into his important book Shakespeare's Festive Comedy (1959). He there develops his thesis that comedy reflects the pursuit of social freedom, even license, of the great festivals and holy days of the Christian calendar; these celebrations keep the social order stable by providing a way of releasing energies normally checked by the English social hierarchy.

Three specialized studies of Shakespeare's later comedies which have been useful in pursuing the theme of forgiveness, a theme which becomes more explicit because forgiveness is more necessary in the Problem Plays and the Romances, are W.W. Lawrence's Shakespeare's Problem Comedies (1931), E.M.W. Tillyard's Shakespeare's Problem Plays (1949), and R.G. Hunter's Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness (1965). Where Lawrence sees the three Problem Plays as explorations of the darker complexities of human nature, Hunter extends the list to include Shakespeare's last three Romances and finds a denouement of forgiveness common to them all. Hunter's thesis finds the "comedies of forgiveness" to be in the same tradition as the miracle plays, in which dramatic characters are representatives of mankind, with whom we are expected to identify, not sit in judgement. Hunter (the only critic besides Frye to mention them, though in passing) sees the blocking characters of the late plays as humanly erring and sinning representatives of mankind who have rejected their wives, the heroines of the plays, yet find their salvation through them. Robert Watson's Shakespeare and the Hazards of Ambition (1981) is a theological study of the other side, of the men who find their salvation in women, and the ambitious and the overreaching part of their natures which lead them into rigidities of character and the sterilities of destructive ambition. Watson's book has been particularly helpful on the Romances, where ambition creates illusions that are self-blocks for the male protagonists.

Two studies allied with the theological caution Watson sets out for Shakespeare's ambitious characters are Hugh Richmond's Shakespeare's Sexual Comedy (1971), and Susan Snyder's The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies (1981). Richmond recognizes the danger of love which is devoted inflexibly to any brittle and indefensible ideal. He sees Romeo as a character who is just as destructive as Hamlet, but in the somewhat different sphere of romantic tragedy.

Richmond has been especially helpful in my understanding of the theme of eternal life in The Winter's Tale; he finds in Shakespeare's sonnets a skeptical and flexible accommodation to a love which accepts realistic human limitations, an attitude which is proper for an enduring love-relationship for everyone, and an attitude which Shakespeare's comic heroines represent. Along with Snyder and Dusinberre, Richmond identifies Shakespeare's profound respect for the meliorating and peacemaking qualities of women and of feminine values. Dusinberre states what the other two books make use of in Shakespeare: the custom barring women from the stage was a fortunate obstacle that forced Shakespeare to put in his language the essential qualities of women and in this way pay tribute to a sensibility he profoundly respected. Snyder finds these feminine qualities in both the tragedies and the comedies. She asserts that comedy perspective sharpens the difference between the comic and the tragic, and that tragedy is an aberration in life which is usually "common and ongoing, an endless stream in which we participate, but not the whole story" (p.41). From her delineation of the difference between the two opposed modes of life, the comic and the tragic, a clearer perspective on the opposition of comic blocking characters to their comic worlds emerges: blocking characters share some of the characteristics of tragic characters, such as inflexibility, humorlessness, ambition, and stubborn dedication to self-limiting goals.

Enid Welsford's The Fool (1935) and Leslie Hotson's Shakespeare's Motley (1952) are valuable studies in the social and stage phenomena of the Elizabethan court jester and the professional fool, a role which is in some ways unique to Shakespeare. Clowns and fools of some kind are present in nearly all of Shakespeare's plays. Both studies help to define the irrational and the vulnerable which co-exist with the responsible and the strong in tragedy and comedy. Welsford is especially perceptive about the special social station and powerlessness of the fool. Wisdom characterizes Shakespeare's fools, which is not often true of the fools of his rival playwrights. Both books have helped to define the principle of a kind of non-interventionist word-play as an active principle of good in the clown episodes of Shakespearean drama. That part of comic language spoken by Shakespeare's clowns is the freest in verbal play and the kindest in its intention toward the rest of the world. Indeed, the clowns in Shakespeare are the clearest signals of the kindness and common sense which informs all of Shakespeare's comedies.

Richmond Noble's Shakespeare's Biblical Knowledge (1935) and Roland M. Frye's Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine (1963) are important in examining the foundation of Elizabethan ethical beliefs, if only because Shakespeare was born into and wrote in a Christian culture. Emrys Jones in

The Origins of Shakespeare (1977) reminds us that Shakespeare lived in a culture of Erasmian Christian humanism, and makes a good case for Shakespeare having developed his tragedies from the mystery play cycles. His book serves to remind us that Shakespeare's proximity to a Christian intellectual and artistic tradition was lifelong. I think Shakespeare was profoundly a product of his time, as deeply imbued with the teachings of the New Testament as any writer of his age.

Sherman Hawkins' "The Two Worlds of Shakespearean Comedy" (1967) divides the comedies into two classes, "green world" or open comedies, and "closed world" or "one place" comedies; the first group includes The Two Gentlemen of Verona, A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Merchant of Venice, and As You Like It, the second group The Comedy of Errors, Love's Labour's Lost, Much Ado About Nothing, and Twelfth Night. The Taming of the Shrew and The Merry Wives of Windsor incorporate both worlds, "two strongly contrasted locales, representing two different orders of reality, and the movement of action from one to the other" (p.65). Characters who flee to the "green world," where desire is imaginatively free, find their wishes transforming into wish-fulfillment; conversely, the inhabitants of "closed world" comedies are upset by intruders like Viola and Sebastian in Twelfth Night, who disrupt the routine of ritual bondage in the comic worlds they enter. The "green world" obstacles "are not internal: they are barriers of social convention or parental prejudice" (p. 73).

> the heroes and heroines themselves sometimes resemble humor characters, imprisoned in their inhibitions and aggressions, isolated by fear or repugnance from the general life, cut off not merely from others whom they ought to love, but even from themselves. (p. 68)

The "public and social equivalent" of such attitudes is an arbitrary law, usually invoked at the beginning of a comedy, like the law barring Syracusans on pain of death from commerce with Ephesus. However, the visitors to the "closed world" comedies "draw its thwarted or random emotional forces to themselves" (p.68), and the happy endings in the "closed world" comedies are brought about by the unawareness of the intruding character towards the emotional freedom he or she represents: "The happy ending comes about not by perseverance through trials and change of fortune, as in the green world comedies, but by a conversion, a reversal, a change of heart" (p.69).

In "The Range of Shakespeare's Comedy" (1964) Edward Hubler points to the redeemable nature of all folly in Shakespeare's characters: "It is an orthodox Christian doctrine that nothing is entirely evil, not evil in itself, for good may grow out of it: so may we not have a little more regard for folly?" (p.57). Folly is not subject to the usual satiric correction in Shakespeare because his disreputable characters are meant to be seen in the light of

Meredith's comic spirit (loved for their faults but also aware of them). Hubler says we do not take "a moral view" of Shakespeare's subplot clowns and ne'er-do-wells and fools because we do not want them to be better than they are. Hubler's essay touches on the nature of Shakespearean comedy which makes blocking characters so ultimately reconcilable, the forgiving nature of the Shakespearean comic spirit, which almost never has as a last aim the social correctiveness of satire, but seeks to make its comic world reconcilable to itself, beyond all follies and antagonisms.

In "The Rejection Scene in 2 Henry IV," Edward Berry analyses the meaning of the conjunction of the history world (Hal newly crowned as King Henry V) and the comedy world (Falstaff's complacent assumption that Hal's coronation will bring legal sanction to his life beyond the law). He agrees with Bradley that the banishment is "startling, awkward, and painful," but also inevitable and just. Berry helps us toward a definition of two genres by asserting that Hal merges his own will with that of time, and his private self with destiny, a deliberate narrowing of self for the part that England demands of him, one of several roles which are a part of self, but not, as with Falstaff, the entire self. In a history world Falstaff proves unable to cope with the time and change of an historical reality. As Berry says, he trips over his own expectations, having programmed himself for a "King Hal," and his rejection leads to a redemption of

England and law and order. Berry leads us to the realization that Falstaff has been more a part of the self-defining history world than we had previously thought, because we realize that Falstaff's infinite extension into time (apart from his literary immortality) requires extraordinary privileges, which only the royal sanction of the history world could grant, and then only for a limited time. Berry proves an intelligent critic about the limitations of Shakespeare's dramatic genres, and his insight moves us a little closer to an explanation of the difference between comic antagonists, or "blocking characters," and comic protagonists, who form the new comic order in Shakespeare's comedies. Berry implies, but never explicitly states, that Hal does what he must do as England's anointed king, but not what Shakespeare wants him to do, a distinction which hints at the comic immortality of Falstaff after all.

Hubler and Berry make good statements about Shakespeare's reconciling powers in comedy, to the comic world the comic antagonists must be banished from or reconciled to, and the reasons why one famous comic character has to be rejected. Berry defines the reasons for rejection of a character we would not call a comic antagonist since he represents festivity, but nevertheless an antagonist to the ordered world he lives in a parasitical relationship to. V.Y. Kanzak's "An Approach to Shakespearean Comedy" (1969), discusses the power of happiness in

Shakespearean comedy "to draw opposite polarities into sudden confrontation" (p.11). The comic vistas that occasionally open in comedy give us a sudden glimpse of the chance happiness comedy seems to offer, for example, Feste's song at the end of Twelfth Night. Following Barber's thesis of clarification and release, we glimpse the tragic force of life in a clarification "akin to the release experienced in Don Quixote. . .we detect in it something of the liberating quality of great Farce"(p.11). The clarification "has a strange power to induce reflection. . .which is a metaphysical power." Kanzak recognizes the tragic in comedy, a fusion which follows Frye's thesis of the presence of comedy in tragedy and tragedy in comedy. In essence it agrees with Samuel Johnson's contention in his Preface to Shakespeare (1765) that comedy was Shakespeare's natural bent and that he wrote tragedy from a comedy matrix. Hubler's, Berry's, and Kanzak's articles form a synthesis by dealing with comic antagonism, the comic world which defines the comic antagonist, and the tragic recognition at the center of the most clearly recognized kind of comic polarity, farcical action. In an approximate way, that is the purpose of this dissertation.

According to H.B. Charlton, Shakespeare's major blocking characters are those in whom the "genial sense of fellowship with mankind" is lacking. For example, Malvolio is "sick of self-love," thanking God he is not of the same element as other men, but he is only a time-server, seeking selfish gain. The comic villains Don John and Oliver work only to gratify their own antipathies. For Charlton, the heart of Shakespeare's humanism is "gratitude," and life in the comedies is the setting up of harmonies and beneficent relationships with other human beings; they are, in contrast to Shakespeare's blocking characters, practical about the possibilities of the human spirit.

> Shakespeare's heroines are not deliberate philanthropists; they are only being their spontaneous selves when they instinctively proffer kindness to others. Shakespeare's heroines seek what they want for themselves, but securing it they give joy to others.[14]

Charlton's thesis is valuable as an approach to understanding the limitations and rigidities of comic blocking characters; we can discover in the maturation of the comedy spirit in Shakespeare's romantic comedies the subtler forms of selfishness and ambition which make for comic antagonists. By knowing what is true and generous in Shakespeare's comic heroines, we can know what is ungenerous in his blocking characters.

Shakespeare's Festive Comedy by C.L. Barber (1958) says that the term of holiday comments on the importance of every day: holiday and saturnalia are the most obvious manifestations of community and shared life, and Barber implies in his study of the festival comedies (which exclude the comedies and the romances) that readers must be aware of the other days of the year, and how the festival spirit releases the energy devoted to the awe and respect of authority, if they are to understand the importance of misrule in Shakespearean comedy.

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[14] H.B. Charlton, Shakespearean Comedy, London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1938, p. 292.

The importance of Barber's study remains in his extraordinary sensitivity to individual plays. His chapter on A Midsummer Night's Dream, for example, catches the delicate comedy and the interplay between fantasy and substance in a way that proves impossible to summarize. The excellence of his criticism does, nevertheless, extend the limits of a study of blocking characters by discovering inflexible attitudes and ritual bondage in the most indistinguishable outlines of Shakespeare's festival comedies. Barber makes fine distinctions between self-limiting illusions and the festive generosity of the festival plays. As Barber says about the ending of Love's Labour's Lost, the only comedy among the early comedies which ends without marriage, "Shakespeare can do without marriage at the end, and still end affirmatively, because he is dramatizing an occasion in a community, not just private lives."[15]

Book-length studies of Shakespearean comedies are as varied as the comedies they attempt to interpret. Comedy, at least in Shakespeare's version of comedy, is a coherent and comprehensive statement of the ordinary, the untragic, the meliorated, and the continuing: it is not a mistake that the collected comedies form by far the largest number of dramas in one genre; it is also no coincidence that Johnson said Shakespeare wrote with ease when he composed comedy and laboured when he created tragedy, because tragedy and tragic lies are the representatives of desperately difficult forms of endeavour against the doom and limitations of time, while time is an ally of comedy. The self-definition tragedy inevitably leads to is narrower and far more restricted than the broad and generous definition of life's possibilities comedy leads to, but surely no deeper. The depth of feeling, and the height of feeling, which is one of St. Paul's attempts at defining the dimensions of love, is not a realization after the fact in comedy as it may well be in tragedy.

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[15] C.L.Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy, Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1968, p.111.

Blocking characters are important to comedy because they tell us immediately what anti-comic forces the spirit of each individual comedy will have to contend with. Frye has clearly identified the character types which make up the "blocking characters" in general, but it is the task of future critics to say what exactly distinguishes their allegiance with the anticomedic in each particular comedy. It is a truism that Shakespeare's characters are appreciated for their psychological truth and realistic humanity, but if that is so, then we must attempt to find out what makes blocking characters redeemable and reconcilable with their comic worlds at the end of all Shakespeare's comedies. Frye has done us a great service in criticism by establishing a continuity between blocking characters from one play to the next, yet much work needs to be done to complete the comic identification and continuity of blocking characters Professor Frye has started.

II. Age and Crabbed Youth: The Senex in Shakespearean Comedy

The role of the senex is as old as fathering itself; indeed, it could be said that the grief and disappointment of fatherhood started with the original family in the Garden of Eden with Adam, Eve, and God. After the Fall, God is a disappointed and outwitted, and more importantly, an angry senex and therefore Adam and Eve must live outside of Paradise forever. The fact that Eve broke the law forbidding her to eat of the fruit of the tree shows that she meant to get around an authority figure, a figure temporarily in the background, whom she thought was forbidding her the chance to become divine.

The New Comedy of the Roman playwrights Plautus (254-184 B.C.) and Terence (186-159 B.C.) creates a senex who is a well-meaning but easily fooled authority figure.In Plautus, the senex becomes a character in its own right; the senex functions either as a blocking character to a young man's desires, or as a meliorating parent anxious for his son's happiness and willing to raise the status of his son's love to that of middle-class respectability. Plautus sometimes makes the senex a sympathetic character; the character of Periplectomenus in The Braggart Warrior indicates that Plautus knew the comic and satiric limitations of the senex figure, so he gave the kindly neighbor a soliloquy in which Periplectomenus explains his departure from the type:

> Periplectomenus: Likewise I'll prove to be either a merry jester or a gracious guest, nor do I contradict others at the banquet. I duly desire not to be disagreeable to the guests.[1]

In Plautus, the senex has some flexibility on his side, but he does not really function as a father-figure. In Terence, on the other hand, the senex usually does show the concern of a father, knowing both his age and place in the comedy. He never competes with a son for a girl and always tries to make sure his son can keep the girl he picks. As Frye says in the Anatomy of Criticism, age and youth are enemies because of sexual rivalry, a part of comedy Terence never exploited. Terence's plays seem to put forward a different morality from that they begin with. That is, they accept the social conditions implicit at the beginning of the play (that some women are slaves and therefore they can be bought and sold, and some women without families to take care of them must work as courtesans), but by the end of his plays the courtesan has become a wife and has been taken into the fold of her husband's family. Terence's major advance on Greek comedy was his doubling of characters in the plots of his plays, which leads to a peculiar modernity of tone.

Plautus and Terence wrote variations upon the senex, knowing his potential to become a blocking character. Both knew the dangers of the senex role and to some extent avoided them by creating more sympathetic senex figures. Terence's do much for the refinement and humanity of his plays, making his comedies in some ways vehicles for more sympathetic characters than the senex figures the Renaissance created.

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[1] "The Braggart Warrior," The Complete Roman Drama, ed. George E. Duckworth, Vol. 1. New York: Random House, p. 574.

Most comedies of the Renaissance create flat and predictable senex figures: Beaumont, Chapman, Dekker, Haywood, Jonson, Lyly, and Middleton use senex figures to create plot complications, not as interesting characters with psychological depth.

The satirical comedians use unsympathetic senex figures as a standard part of their dramatis personae. The senexes in Chapman's plays are standard figures in All Fools (1599) and Sir Giles Goosecap, Knight and in The Blind Beggar of Alexandria (1596), Chapman's earliest comedy dealt with here, Ptolemy the senex gives his daughter Aspasia's hand to Doricles, but the senex choice is killed when he gets in the way. The man who kills him is Count Hermes, Cleanthes in disguise, a character of tremendous energy and three separate stage identities, who woos two wives and attempts to cuckhold himself, and is more than a match for any senex choice.

The senex leads to some of Chapman's best romantic writing in The Gentleman Usher (ca.1602), where Vince and Margaret's fathers resolve to prevent their marriage. This causes them to plight their troths to each other, make up their own vows, and defy their father's wishes, until Alphonzo the senex changes his mind when Mendice's villainy comes to light. The Earl of Smidon is the easily outmaneuvered senex in Dekker's The Shoemaker's Holiday (1600). Lacy has to go in disguise to win his love, the Lord-Mayor's daughter Rose, and get around the aristocratic snobbery of his uncle. The same kind of snobbery afflicts the king in Greene's The Honorable History of Friar Bacon and Friar Bongay (ca.1591), where the king brings back one of his nobles to court to marry a court lady, but Lacy picks Margaret, the game-keeper's daughter, instead. Dekker and Middleton's The Roaring Girl (1610) gives us Sir Alexander Wengrave, who gives in to his son's romantic wishes when he believes that his son Sebastiasn will marry the reformer of the suburbs,-the roaring girl, Moll Firth.

Heywood's The Wise Women of Hogsdon (1604) furnishes the play with a senex, Sir Harry, and a matchmaker, the wise woman, a fortune teller, bawd and a baby-farmer. She maneuvers Chartley, a rake, into marrying his jilted bride, Luce, and Sir Harry's daughter Gratiana, gets around her father and eventually marries Sencer. The chaotic plot leads up to a re-aligning of all the male characters with their proper girls, and a triple marriage.

Thomas Middleton's A Trick to Catch the Old One (date uncertain) puts two senexes on stage, Witgood's uncle Pecunious Lucre, and the rival usurer Walkadine Hoard.

Witgood maneuvers his uncle into giving him back the lands which were his inheritance, and gets the uncle's rival, Hoard, to pay all his bills and marry his cast-off mistress. *A Mad World My Masters* is a better-natured farce than Middleton's earlier play, but not much. In *A Mad World* a rather kindly but tight-fisted *senex*, Follywit's grandfather Sir Bounteous Progress, gets a comic revenge on his nephew. The plot ends with the trickster tricked, because Follywit discovers he has married his grandfather's courtesan, Gullman. Both plays come closer to the Roman model than other Renaissance plays, because Middleton's *senexes* have kindly natures. The character of Sir Bounteous Progress does not exist in Latin comedy, but his good-natured affection for his grandson is like that of Terence's good-natured parents.

Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607) has a standard *senex* in Venturewell, a merchant who refuses to let his good apprentice Jasper marry his daughter Luce and picks Humphrey, a rich and stupid youth instead. A variation is Jasper's father, old Merrythought, who eats, drinks, laughs, and has no care where the money is coming from. Jasper receives an inheritance of 10 shillings from his prodigal father but throws it away. Instead of refusing to let his son marry any girl but his choice, he lets his son shift for himself, but Jasper has to threaten to haunt Venturewell before he consents to let him marry his daughter.

Beaumont's play is much better and much funnier than Jonson's Eastward Ho! (1605), where the apprentice Golding marries his employer's choice, and prospers and becomes an object lesson to the vanity and pretensions of the bad apprentice Quicksilver and Touchstone's pretentious daughter Gertrude.

Ben Jonson's earliest plays put his kindliest senexes on stage. Edward Knowell, Sr. and Kitely are two vulnerable senexes who worry about their sons. Knowell Sr. fears his son will be influenced by the corrupt ways of the city, and Kitely is a generous, good-hearted merchant who fears that his foundling child Cash will prove ungrateful for being apprenticed in his business; he also worries about the prodigal ways of his brother Wellbred and about the fidelity of his young wife in a house full of gallants. Both senexes earn audience sympathy for their suffering; Knowell's lament that he raised his boy right, never introduced him to the stews, kept him away from sharp money practices, and avoided gluttony gains the audience's sympathy. Both Kitely and Edward Knowell Sr. think they are helpless to stop a rake's progress, but their care is rewarded at the end of the play with Knowell's son safely married to a girl the father approves of and Kitely's wife true to her husband.

Volpone (1606) builds its entire plot on the legacy-hunting greed of suitors to a fake senex, the feigned-ill

Volpone, and collapses around the true identity Volpone reveals to the court when Mosca provokes his greed. The punishment handed down to him, prison in chains until he is as feeble as he pretends to be, is a punishment which will make him a senex for real, and finally tilts audience sympathy to the masters of the con game. Old age and senility do not become satiric objects until the senex attempts to block the desires of youth or to compete with youth for the favors of a woman.

Jonson's The Silent Women (1609) builds a plot around Dauphine's efforts to circumvent his widower uncle Morose's threat to re-marry and disinherit him. The senex impediment to Dauphine's legacy is negotiated by Dauphine's plan to marry his noise-hating uncle to a woman who suddenly becomes garrulous after the marriage, but who is really a boy disguised as a woman.

Shakespeare carefully avoided the negative role of the senex, unless Malvolio's age can be held against him and he can be considered as playing the role of an old man competing with a younger man for Olivia. Shakespeare's plays are in the Terentian spirit, involving the senex in the romantic intrigue but more as a meliorator and guardian than as a sexual competitor. The only "old man" besides the pantaloon Gremio who fancies himself a sexual competitor in Shakespeare's plays is Falstaff, and, if we exclude The Merry Wives of Windsor on the grounds that here he is competing for matrons who are closer to his own age than the romantic heroines of other comedies, then we can make the point that Falstaff _was_ loved by a young woman, Doll Tearsheet. His patriarchal position in his tavern-family puts him closer to being the protagonist in an Old Greek comedy, that is, in an Aristophanic dramatic situation in which the protagonist wins the girl, than as an object of the Freudian antagonism of Greek New Comedy and Latin comedy. Shakespeare bore no hostility toward "old men" simply for being old, at least not in the comedy genre.

Shakespeare did not question the priorities of comedy (youth and romance) in his comedies but gave the exploration of that theme over to his comic heroines, whereas his contemporaries devoted romantic pursuits to the male romantic leads. His comic heroines never misuse the privilege; oppressed females who question the reality of their situation as an expression of their anguish and unhappiness disappear by the time of _A Midsummer Night's Dream_, which is the first play to break the close imitation of Latin and Renaissance sources in plotting, and which leads the reader to the conclusion that Shakespeare's comedy gave more room to the expression of female concerns in comic action, and changed the status of females from objects of competition to that of participators in, and sometimes directors of, the dramatic action.

Shakespeare created two new kinds of female character, the unhappy female, scarcely seen in Terence and rare in Plautus, and the female who becomes the dramatic protagonist of comedy. Since female characters in Roman comedy are not noted for either introspection or action, Shakespeare gives us two new stage creations. The senex has less opportunity to oppose or obstruct the wishes of youthful lovers when the heroine begins to run the show, and it is instructive to note that the unhappiness of the heroine decreases in direct proportion to the decrease in the influence and dominance of senexes and senex figures. One of the identifying marks of Shakespeare's "green world" in the middle comedies is the absence of older authority figures, as Sherman Hawkins points out.[2]

The senex is a peripheral figure in Shakespearean comedy because the structure of most of his comedies does not follow that of Latin comedy. Old men do not dominate Shakespearean comedy; the youths, and specifically the female youths do, from about 1595, the probable date of A Midsummer Night's Dream. Theseus sides with Egeus' choice of the arbitrary rules of an arranged marriage or celibacy at the beginning of the play and becomes a sympathetic listener near the end of the play, after the night in the Athenian wood has passed, but by that time the emotions of the four Athenian youths have aligned themselves with their original love objects, and Demetrius has given up his suit for Hermia. Theseus seems nearly as young as the lovers he interprets the law for, and the _senex_, Egeus, has no suitor to give his choice to; Demetrius has gone back to Helena, his original love, and the _senex_ can no longer exercise his authority through the expression of _senex_ authority in a son-in-law.

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[2] Sherman Hawkins, "The Two Worlds of Shakespearean Comedy," Shakespeare Studies, Vol.3, 1967, pp. 62-81.

Egeon in _The Comedy of Errors_ (ca. 1590) is a far more sympathetic _senex_ figure than is _A Midsummer Night's Dream_'s Egeus. Many critics have noticed in the earlier play how vulnerable and sympathetic a figure he is when he must submit to execution in the midst of his search for his son, who had gone looking for his lost twin brother seven years before. Egeon is a character of pathos, condemned to die after five summers spent fruitlessly searching for his son without the hope of seeing him again, or his son lost in childhood, or his long-lost wife Emilia. Egeon is in danger of losing all identity, dying in complete anonymity in a strange land and with no friend or family to remember him or mourn his death. The authority of the _senex_ which, as Frye says, is mainly social and economic, has been completely effaced at the beginning of _The Comedy of Errors_.[3] Egeon does not have resources to ransom his life and is in danger of losing his identity on earth in his attempt to find his family and reunite them. His status is far from the comfortable economic circumstances of Terence's senexes and a far cry from the flamboyance of the senex figures of Shakespeare's contemporaries.

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[3] Frye, _The Anatomy of Criticism_, pp. 163-65.

The Taming of the Shrew (ca. 1590) has several variations on the senex. Baptista, the father, provides for the security of his eldest daughter's place in society by preventing his youngest daughter's marriage until his oldest daughter gets married. This could be considered a senex prevention of his youngest daughter's marriage, but at the beginning of the play Bianca has not chosen anyone, yet, nor does she mind the competition for her hand. Gremio, a rich old merchant, is the traditional senex who justifies the imposition of age with wealth: "Myself am stuck in years, I must confess,/ And if I die tomorrow this is hers/If whilst I live she will be only mine" (Taming of the Shrew,II.i.362-65). Lucentio is both richer and younger than he is, and outbids him in his attempt to win Baptista's consent; the young suitor wins where age usually has control, wealth. Vincentio becomes the senex rejuvenated when he meets Kate and Petruchio on the road from Petruchio's house back to Padua, when Kate calls him "Young budding virgin, fair and fresh and sweet" (T. of S., III,36). Vincentio is far more confident of his social and patriarchal powers than poor Egeon was; his family and servants do not get away with denying his existence for very long, nor does he stand in much danger of losing his identity. Confusion about his identity in V,i lasts only about 60 lines before Lucentio is kneeling before him and asking for forgiveness.

Kate calls Petruchio himself an old man; she sarcastically calls him "a young one" first and then tells him bluntly he is "withered," but Petruchio takes her slights in stride, having heard worse noises and faced greater dangers than a shrew. Petruchio incorporates _senex_ jealousy or perhaps a _senex_ choice into his strategy to win Kate, telling Baptista when Baptista despairs of marrying his daughter, "I see you do not mean to part with her,/ Or else you like not of my company" (_T.of S._ II.i.63-4). Petruchio invents the conventional obstacles to marrying a desirable young girl and combines them with his stubborn conception of her winning and pleasant nature, which is the opposite of her disposition: "For thou art pleasant, gamesome, passing courteous,/ But slow in speech, yet sweet as springtime flowers" (II.i.247-8). Petruchio uses the conventional _senex_ blocks to marriage to his advantage, building a public image of Kate she finds harder and harder to deny.

In _The Two Gentlemen of Verona_ (ca. 1590), and probably the earliest of Shakespeare's comedies, Proteus is torn away from Julia by his father. Antonio's decision to send him to the Emperor's court in Milan to receive the same courtly training his friend Valentine receives is a _senex_ decision much like the decision of Old Capulet to marry Juliet to the

County Paris, which sets the tragedy in motion, but in this case Proteus gets over the separation and true to his name, changes his affections from Julia to Valentine's sweetheart. Later, the Duke of Milan turns into a *senex iratus* in a ridiculous exposure scene in Act III scene i, in which Proteus' eager answers gradually betray his plans for eloping with Silvia, and he is eventually caught with the evidence on his person when the Duke opens Valentine's cloak and exposes the rope ladder Valentine planned to use to liberate the Duke's daughter, whom he keeps locked in a tower, a conventional *senex* protection of a marriageable maiden. The play also exhibits a *senex* choice, Thurio, who shows the good sense not to fight a duel for a woman who does not love him, and who gives way to Valentine's claim on her.

But the *senex* obstacles to true love do not make much difference in a play where all of the treachery in love is focussed on one character, Proteus. His changing affections put Valentine and Julia in the best light for constancy and loyalty in love and make the difficulties caused by parental decisions seem insignificant in comparison. There are no *senex* decisions which prevent true love, unless Proteus' enforced leaving of Julia could be considered the cause of all the difficulties Proteus causes and the betrayals he is guilty of. Proteus betrays Valentine's elopement, not out of a sense of loyalty to the *senex*'s wish for a wealthy match, but to further his own wishes. *Senex* behavior is quite conventional, but the young lovers themselves are guilty of treachery or fecklessness; the comic formula which says young lovers know exactly what they want does not hold true in this play.

Love's Labour's Lost doubles the four lovers of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* into two sets of four lovers, Ferdinand of Navarre and his three lords, who form the foolish academy which swears to stay away from women for three years, and the Princess of France and her three attendant ladies, Rosalind, Maria, and Katharine. There are no *senexes* as such in the play, but Ferdinand's view of monastic study could be considered *senex* misogyny, and Marcade's announcement of the death of the King of France at the end of the play imposes a year-long period of mourning on the assembled company, Armado excepted, who is in effect already married to Jacquenetta. The influence of the Princess's father expands his *senex* authority after his death, but serves to clarify and test the validity of the betrothal offer of the King and his lords.[4] Rather than defy her father's wishes, it could be said that the Princess shows the good sense she was trained up to, cautious enough to question the vows of a suitor who has previously vowed to stay away from women. The off-stage influence of the dead king seems a stabilizing factor in a match which will have important consequences for others; the Princess's caution anticipates the disorder in the natural sphere which marriage troubles between Oberon and Titania cause in Shakespeare's _A Midsummer Night's Dream_, which has much simpler _senex_ figures.

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[4] Barber's "clarification" is an especially useful critical term here, even though Ferdinand's company will have their vows tested for a year before the Princess and her ladies will agree to a "world-without-end" bargain. Many other critics have made the same point using different terms for the sudden change in the emotional tone of the play.

The foursome of _senex_ choice, a rejected but loving maiden, and two lovers who are sure of their love but prevented from marrying by a _senex_ refusal repeats itself in Shakespeare's next play, _A Midsummer Night's Dream_, with Demetrius, Helena, Hermia, and Lysander. Theseus upholds the law at first, preventing Hermia from picking her beloved Lysander, but after the night in the wood, and after Demetrius returns his affections to his former betrothed, he overcomes the _senex_ demand, siding with the original choices of the lovers. Egeus' hysteria when he discovers his daughter sleeping in the Athens wood sounds like Shylock in the courtroom: "I beg the law, the law, upon his head." Even the nervous repetitions of Egeus' language are characteristic of Shylock's language and his narrow obsession with revenge. What this law is remains uncertain because the reader knows only about the penalties of the marriage law which apply to Hermia: apparently there is a penalty for trying to evade the arbitrary marriage law, but Theseus does not mention what it is. Egeus is the most arbitrary of *senexes* in the early comedies, looking for punishment of his daughter at the beginning of the play and of Lysander, who is not the *senex* choice, near the end of the play.

Helena, the willowy, and "weepy" maiden, as Madeline Doran calls her,[5] has no father in the play to comfort her in her bereft condition, which places her in the same group as Shakespeare's unjustly accused women of the Tragedies and Romances; she shares in comic form the jealousies and accusations which break over Desdemona's and Hermione's heads, but for exactly the opposite reason: she has been rejected, not suspected of unfaithfulness. Yet there is some poetic justice in Helena being loved by both Demetrius and Lysander at once, and something satisfying about Hermia's jealous anger at being rejected by Lysander. Helena's exclusion is comic, not tragic, and as Susan Snyder says so astutely, she proves the rule in Shakespearean comedy that "everyone ends up with someone."[6] *Senex* interference in the desire of the young can also be considered *senex* concern; Helena's temporary plight is that of a fatherless maiden and anticipates to a slight degree the tragic and tragicomic abandonments of Shakespeare's later heroines.

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[5] Madeline Doran. "A Midsummer Night's Dream: Introduction." *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, ed. A. Harbage. New York: The Viking Press, 1975, p. 147.

[6] Susan Snyder, *The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies: Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Othello, and King Lear*.Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, p.43.

Shylock is the archetypal _senex_ of Renaissance comedy; no character in Shakespearean comedy ever tries so hard to extend his financial influence to the apparent neglect of his daughter Jessica's emotional, and perhaps, her spiritual needs. His opponent is his exact opposite in _senex_ influence; Portia's deceased father imposes a lasting parental block on her free choice of a suitor, but his test in the form of the casket choice proves Portia's father's wisdom because she will finally be chosen by a man willing to look beyond the seductive display of wealth and "risk all" for his choice. If Shylock tries to control his economic competitors and his daughter with the power of the checkbook by calling in the loan on one competitor and shutting the doors on all potential suitors, Portia's father has assured that the man who chooses his daughter thinks little of money, at best, or does not know its value, at worst. Portia's hand can be given to a suitor who manages to get past the tempting beauty and potentially corrupting riches of the gold and silver caskets which seem to hold her in bondage but which in reality hold her suitors in bondage with their subtle, mesmerizing influence.

Portia, with all the beauty and riches in the world, feels unworthy of her lover, not rich enough in "virtues, beauties, livings, friends" (III.ii.156), yet seems to be relieved of this insecurity only after she has been won by her husband, and she becomes the architect of the comic action, saving Bassanio's best friend from death. Bassanio is improvident (but has been thought worse than that by many critics[7]), generous, and used to spending everything in the way he lives, with a good table and good liveries for his servants, a standard of living which tempts Lancelot Gobbo over to his side. His generous and improvident living style is good preparation for taking the risk of losing everything and at the same time for loving Portia for herself; because money means so little to him, he is not blinded by the wealth represented by the caskets, and with a clear head he chooses the one that represents what his choice means: the death of marriage if he chooses money, since a wrong choice means "if you choose wrong/Never to speak to lady afterward/ In way of marriage" (II.i.40-42).

Portia's father puts the third casket in the place the consequences of the choice occupy, implying to all suitors if they can take their eyes off the temptation and the false alliance of wealth and beauty Portia seems to represent (. . ."her sunny locks/Hang on her temples like a golden fleece" I.i. 169-70), that Portia's hand requires the taking of a genuine risk, that a virtual comic death awaits the suitor who chooses wrongly. Bassanio has only himself to offer, but Morocco and Aragon have riches to protect and add to; Bassanio successfully avoids temptation in his choice, passing the senex test of Portia's father, and like Christian in The Pilgrim's Progress, avoids being waylaid by the silver mountain by choosing the lead casket. His indebtedness turns Bassanio away from money instead of leading him to it, and allows him to pass Portia's father's test.

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[7] Various critics call him a bum, a fortune-hunter, a failure in the business world of Venice, and a generally shiftless character.

Shylock goes in the opposite direction with his financial power; he attempts to force his wishes on the Christian merchants of Venice by using his wealth as an extension (instrument) of revenge. Shylock forgets the human vulnerability made so famous in his "Hath not a Jew eyes?" soliloquy in his obsession with revenge, an unalterable fact Portia reminds him of when she hands out her judgement that Shylock can cut out his pound of flesh but "not a jot of blood." The flesh Shylock would carve and kill points up exactly the same vulnerability and humanness Shylock reminds his tormentors of when he says he is "fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is" (III.i.52-5). The active contempt of Antonio, which has honed Shylock's senex instincts, makes him feelingly aware that he has suffered, but he forgets that he must be alive to do so. If he shares vulnerability with Antonio, he must also share life, and Portia makes sure that he does, restraining him from taking human life and descending to a moral level below that of his tormentors. Ironically, Shylock only can be reminded of the humanness he is so passionately aware of by the presentation of his enemy's humanness to him. Portia presents the man who represents a threat to the happiness of her marriage (by his threat of death to her husband's best friend) with a block that simply cannot be gotten around.

All of Shylock's senex powers are stripped from him when he is stripped of his wealth, then required by Antonio to give the returned half of his wealth to Lorenzo and Jessica when he dies. Jessica never voices opposition to her father, but she does go her own way, spending Shylock's money recklessly on her honeymoon, as if to spite her father's miserly ways. Shylock is slow to marry his daughter and locks her and his money away, so Jessica's spendthrift ways are a way of breaking her father's power over her. Shylock locks his house up tight to noise and street revelry; the reader last sees Jessica under the wide starry night sky, imagining with Lorenzo that she hears the music of the spheres in a universe celestially ordered. The ending seems to have forgotten Shylock's claims on Jessica as a parent,[8] but basically Shylock's financial power over his daughter has been broken; Jessica has sought and found emotional freedom on her own. Without a doubt, Shylock's exclusion from Jessica's future life is heartless, but it is a punishment for Shylock's potentially tragic overreaching for revenge against another man, not his daughter. The link is there, of course, because Jessica's friends include Portia and Antonio, or will, but the judgement of Jessica towards her father is not explicit, nor does it have anything to do with the legalisms of Shylock's bond. The society opposed to Shylock is not a kind one, and it is so sure of its own values as to be complacent about them, but nevertheless it is a comic world prepared to overthrow the threat Shylock represents and banish him from the play.

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[8] Robert Ornstein. Shakespeare's Comedies: From Roman Farce to Romantic Mystery, Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1986, p. 116.

Shakespeare's "middle" comedies, beginning with Much Ado About Nothing (ca.1600) and ending with Twelfth Night (ca. 1602), are notable for the absence of senex figures. In these comedies fathers have little influence on their sons or daughters, being absent from the plays or having no power when they are a part of it, the single exception being Leonato in Much Ado About Nothing, and he sides so much with Claudio's and Don Pedro's judgement of his daughter (the belated challenge to them to defend his daughter's honor notwithstanding) that his influence on the romantic protagonists is negligible. Oliver and Duke Frederick, two bad brothers, the former an older and the latter a younger brother, are substitutes for senexes in As You Like It (ca. 1600); Duke Senior never notices his daughter, disguised as Ganymede, in Arden Forest until she changes to female dress and presents herself to her father so she can be married to

Orlando. All the fathers in Twelfth Night (1602) have died, including the possible *senex* substitution of Olivia's brother, and no male figure presents himself as a romantic figure in the play until Viola's brother Sebastian shows up. Established matrons and aging men make up the cast of romantic leads in The Merry Wives of Windsor (ca.1600), so the generation which pinches Falstaff for his unclean desires is all a generation of respectable citizens and heads of families, where the only scandalous behavior belongs to Falstaff, who in Henry IV Parts I and II loses his influence with Prince Hal, now turned Henry V, because he is so determined to exist outside the law and beyond the boundaries of age and time.

Charlton points out better than other critics that the middle comedies are the comedies that give Shakespeare's female protagonists room in which to grow, to exercise freely their spiritual prerogatives, and who have much to say about the rules of courtship and know their emotions are as important as the man they fall in love with.[9] Male disguise gives Shakespeare's comic heroines the freedom of a certain amount of introspection and expression about their emotions and forestalls unwanted attentions by males when the comic heroines are in disguise, but Shakespeare still found it necessary to downplay the role of the *senex* in these plays. For example, Shakespeare takes away the authority of the senex in As You Like It; Duke Senior must apparently resign himself to leaving his daughter with her childhood friend and cousin Celia and go off to Arden forest alone; in Much Ado Leonato never even considers his daughter might be slandered when presented with the evidence of his daughter's unchastity, and in Twelfth Night no one is around to help Olivia cut loose from the ritual bonds of grief or help Viola cope with the male prerogative of fighting a duel until her brother Sebastian shows up and in quick succession fills both roles, left vacant at the beginning of the play.

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[9] H.B. Charlton, Shakespearean Comedy, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1938, *passim*.

In Merry Wives, Falstaff, from the perspective of the senex, can be seen as an adolescent as well as an aging rogue, one who will have to be taught the values of neighborliness and trustworthiness before he can be reconciled to the respectable middle-class Windsor world he tries so hard to work as a city comedy. It is as if Jonson's comic world has been plunked down in Stratford, and the city-comedy mentality Falstaff represents is out of its element. The play has been classified as a farce,[10] but the ending reconciles all the characters in neighborly talk, and becomes an acceptance of Falstaff minus his scheming pretensions; instead of the rejection of Henry IV, II, here Falstaff learns something, becomes something less than incorrigible; if he existed before in a life of special privilege beyond the law and indulged by royal favor, and more, existed beyond time and change in a world in which he saw himself as eternally youthful and complacently parasitical, here he is not allowed to act the part. The city-comedy world meets an opposite, respectable world of middle-class virtue where scam and seduction are opposed, exposed, and subsumed by middle-class virtues. While it is impossible to say Falstaff has been reformed (another Falstaff exists in the Henry plays who is an incorrigible old reprobate, true to his own values, and who dies at the turning of the tide in the Boar's Head tavern in Eastcheap), it is possible to say that the city-comedy character of Falstaff and the world that surrounded him which has been transplanted to Windsor, give the reader a character who has had to reform. Shakespeare took the risk of using two sub-genres, the city comedy, and what is potentially the romantic comedy, in one play (a risk Jonson never would have taken) and partially succeeded in the attempt.

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[10] Fredson Bowers. "The Merry Wives of Windsor: Introduction." The Complete Pelican Shakespeare. ed. Alfred Harbage. New York: Viking Book, 1975, pp. 335-7.

The character of Falstaff and the senex are much closer than we think: Susan Snyder has shown us the importance of the parable of the Prodigal Son to Shakespeare's tragedies;[11] the parable establishes a relationship of forgiveness between a father and a son, a relationship which is a favorite of Falstaff's. His room within The Garter Inn "'Tis painted about with the story of the Prodigal, fresh and New" (MWW.IV.v.6-8). From this clue we can surmise that Falstaff cherished a model of a relationship in which he acted the part of the returning and forgiven son, and the father (or father-substitute) would be the forgiving host. Indeed, the relationship between Falstaff and Prince Hal sometimes seems to be a father-and-son relationship, with the older man the father and the younger man the son, but more often it seems as if Hal is the father and Falstaff is the son, as if Falstaff's dependence on the protection of Hal and his royal privileges to keep him from the law, represented by the Lord Chief Justice, were that of father protecting son. In I Henry IV, Falstaff and Hal do exchange places as father and son in the play-within-a-play, which anticipates Hal's reception by his father, Bolingbroke, at Windsor.

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[11] Susan Snyder, "King Lear and the Prodigal Son," Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol. 17, 1966, pp. 361-69.

Falstaff expands laterally as far as he can, establishing his own world of thieves and prostitutes in defiance of the law, but his fondness for the Parable of the Prodigal Son betrays his sentimentality about his dependence on Prince Hal for the continuance of his lifestyle. Falstaff cherishes a relationship of endless forgiveness with the authorities, represented by Prince Hal, one in which he can return home, clap to the doors of the Boar's Head tavern, and "daff[ed] the world aside" (I Henry IV iv.i.96). Hal's rejection of Falstaff re-establishes the proper relationship between father and son, older man and younger man, or at least implies what the proper relationship should be:

> I know thee not, old man. Fall to thy prayers.
> How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!
> (Henry IV.II, V.v.47-8)

The licenced foolery of the professional jester does not befit the reverence and authority which should accompany old age; Falstaff's sentimental notions of his relationship with Hal as one of eternal patriarchal forgiveness do not exist. Instead of being the son whose return is celebrated by the forgiving father, Falstaff in reality has no status at all: he is neither father nor son, and Hal refuses to play the forgiving *senex* any longer.[12]

The "problem" plays, or plays which have a problem ending, bring back the *senex* figure seen first in Shakespeare's early comedies. The generation which Helena and Bertram represent is dominated by the memories of the old, who see present life through the filter of keen regret for the deaths of members of the older generation; in *Measure for Measure* (1604) an initial erosion of responsibility by the Duke leads to a tightened control on the activities of the young in his absence. The *senex* influence is very much in evidence in both plays, but it has become indirect; the young are not guided as much as they are corrected in their mistakes, and they do not arrive at a happiness which satisfies audience expectations. Bertram and Angelo seem like very similar characters, even though Angelo is appointed to administrate sexual morality over the city of Vienna, and contrastingly Bertram is determined to sow some wild oats. They seem similar because both stumble sexually and have to be corrected by distant senex figures, in Bertram's case by a rejuvenated King of France, and in Angelo's by the Duke of Vienna.[13] Instead of reconciliation, correction by a previously absent senex figure takes place first, followed closely by a senex dictation of who pairs off with whom. Samuel Johnson uses the correct verb when he describes Bertram as "dismissed" to happiness; in a sense, Bertram and Angelo are assigned to their deserving wives and brides as much as they are rewarded with them.

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[12] Edward Berry makes much the same point in his article on the history plays, emphasizing the historical forces which require Hal to play partial and less generous roles for the sake of his kingdom. Cf. Edward Berry, "The Rejection Scene in *2 Henry IV*," *Studies in English Literature: 1500-1900*, Vol. 17, 1977, pp. 201-18.

In All's Well That Ends Well (ca. 1602-1604) Helena does not grieve over her father's death because she represents everything he does, and the life force is strong enough in her to let her be a great healer (in the same line as Cordelia and Cerimon, both of whom appear in later plays), wife, and mother too. One imagines her children would not succumb to any childhood diseases, although her medical skill is downplayed by the impossible tasks set before her by Bertram, after Helena has been rewarded with her choice of a husband. Marina is more in line with the Patient Griselda figure (represented in Shakespeare by Mariana of Measure for Measure and Julia of The Two Gentlemen of Verona), so Helena's presence, and her merits as a deserving female are more obvious, which in turn makes Bertram seem more ungrateful and less deserving of such a marvelous wife.

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[13] Frye makes a similar case in his chapter on comedy in the Anatomy of Criticism, but he adds that the absence of a parent-figure in All's Well That Ends Well leaves it with the suggestion of something sinister about it.

Senex figures multiply in the problem plays: the *senex* influence is variously present and absent in All's Well in the memory of Bertram's father, the Count of Ronsillin, and in the collective memory of the extraordinary healing powers of Helena's father, Gerard de Narbon, and also in the healed and rejuvenated King of France, who becomes a more assured parental-authority figure after he has been healed by Helena. The muted role he plays when he is close to death, living much in the past and resigned to his own death, tells us much about the role the two dead and absent fathers played when they were alive.

It is rather the opposite with Vincentio.[14] For many years he abdicates his responsibility to rule in Vienna on sexual matters, and then leaves that responsibility to a substitute. He comes back to Vienna after the proxy-administrator has strayed from his trust and he breaks the deadlock among Isabella, Antonio, and Claudio and their competing and mutually exclusive demands of chastity, lust, and charity, respectively. Although he resolves the dilemma for all three competing perspectives in the comedy, represented by the three above-mentioned characters, he never becomes the masterful eiron/apprentice dramatist Frye defines him as; the play deals with lust, but never really copes with the problem of prostitution, which generally forms a background of sexual licence to the rest of the play. Vincentio never directly confronts the problem of the London suburbs (whose population is mostly victims, used up in the trade) unless his judgement of Lucio can be considered justice to a customer who is a representative of the trade. Lucio's hypocrisy regarding the "trade" is the most obvious example of a customer who distinguishes between good and bad women, and tries to remove himself from an association with the trade he knows well. His hypocrisy goes in tandem with his complacent slander of Vincentio, whom he calls a lusty senex, indulgent towards the stews because he participates in the life. Significantly, Lucio shows no restraint towards slander of a nobleman he does not know, but his attitude towards the brothels forms an ironic counterpoint to the warning in Matthew, "Judge not, lest ye be judged" by being just the opposite of Pharisaical: Lucio thanks God for the double standard, which allows him to be like other men are, so he does not take the girls in the trade seriously until one of them becomes his wife. Vincentio's command to Lucio to marry the whore who has a child by him cuts through Lucio's complacent assumption that no gentleman belongs with a fallen woman by implying that Lucio belongs to a woman of this kind. Vincentio's "forgiveness" does not extend to Lucio, or so he thinks, but instead takes the form of comic "justice" because Vincentio finds Lucio's hypocritical attitude intolerable, and untypical of the representatives of the trade itself, Pompey and Mistress Overdone. Pompey's affable fatalism towards the problem of prostitution--"Does your worship mean to geld and splay all the youth of the city?" (II.i.219)--and his puns and wordplay prove a lot easier for the authorities to take than Lucio's arrogance.

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[14] Critics divide into two critical opinions about Vincentio. Some see him as an ineffective ruler, others as a ruling apprentice-dramatist.

The _senex_ in the Romances, if we think of the definition of _senex_ as "old man" (OED), shades into normal father-daughter relationships,[15] but in _Pericles_ (1609), Antiochus represents a nightmare version of the _senex iratus_, incest being the worst motive for not wishing to marry off a daughter and also an usurpation of a daughter's right to marriage. This version of the blocking character cannot be got around because Antiochus sets up his daughter's marriageability as a riddle with a death penalty for a wrong guess. The senex cannot lose, because the suitor who does solve the riddle has his hopes for marriage crushed. Pericles understands instantaneously that he must make his understanding of the riddle known to the senex without naming the sin. The wrath of the senex could extend to an invasion of Pericles' kingdom, so Pericles has to keep on the run after he has left Antioch. His is the only example in Shakespeare where the wrath of a senex proves to be such a far-reaching and continuing danger, the powerless wrath of Lear being just the opposite in effect.

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[15] Cyrus Hoy's "Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare's Romances." _Shakespeare's Romances Reconsidered_, eds. Kay and Jacobs, London: The University of Nebraska Press, 1978, pp. 77-90.

Fortune grants Pericles another attempt for the hand of a maiden in marriage, this time a virtuous one, in Pentapolis, where his ship has landed after first bringing food to Tharsus. King Simonides plays the senex, but he and his daughter are agreed that Pericles is Thaisa's choice. Pericles' heraldic device on his shield is a withered branch "That's only green at top," an emblem of the partly blasted hopes from his encounter as a suitor with Antiochus and also an emblem of the renewing cycle of the seasons; Thaisa is impregnated the night her marriage is consummated, which underscores the natural and fertile nature of the union. The false senex role King Simonides plays anticipates a role Prospero will play; the false senex is a role in the Romances which is played to test the strength of the suitor's feelings and is abandoned if the suitor passes the test.

Marina suffers from the jealousy of Dionyza, with whom Pericles has left his infant daughter after putting his just-delivered wife overboard in a storm at sea, and who attempts to have Marina killed, but Marina is stolen away by priests and sold to a keeper of a brothel at Myteline. Dionyza is the female counterpart to the "bad brother," and she is in a line with Oliver and Duke Frederick of _As You Like It_; she plays the role of a character whose jealousy banishes the object of it. However, Marina promptly ruins the business of Pander, Bolt, and Bawd by reforming all the customers; their threat to her virginity is powerless in the face of her ability to change the hearts and minds of all those who would attempt it. Marina then begins to live a life of independence and industry, excelling in art and music for patrons in the city, until she comes aboard Pericles' ship in the harbor and, in a long recognition scene, restores him to hope and helps to reunite him later with his wife Thaisa who has become a priestess in the temple of Diana. Pericles' happiness at being re-united with his daughter restores him to vitality again, stripping away the grief which has locked him in a prematurely aged mode of existence.[16]

The _senexes_ in _Pericles_ are the worst possible and the best imaginable (figured representatively in Antiochus and Simonides) of a father's relationship with a marriageable daughter,[17] and by extension, of a suitor's relationship to a protecting senex. In the four Romances the worst qualities of the senex iratus gradually disappear, beginning with Cymbeline, who forbids his daughter's marriage to Posthumous but then is reconciled to it, through to Leontes, who is overjoyed to get his daughter back and happy to have her marry Polixines, and finally to Prospero, who carefully plans the protection of his daughter's innocence and also plans her marriage with the right suitor when she is ready to leave her sheltered island-life.

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[16] Hoy, p. 78.

Cymbeline is the blindest and most foolish of fathers, immune to the court's high respect for the gentlemanly qualities of Posthumous, deaf to his daughter's defense of her choice of husband, and unaware of his wife's wickedness, even if he does say "It had been vicious/To have mistrusted her" when he hears she has taken her life at the end of the play in frustration and despair over the disappearance of Cloten.

In Cymbeline (ca. 1609-10) the jealous husband reappears, created out of the dramatic matrix of Othello five or six years before (1604), and becomes a character which dominates Cymbeline and The Winter's Tale. Posthumous and Leontes' jealousies are murderous enough, although contained by the redemptive pattern of the Romances and mitigated in its effects by the loyalty and love of servants and wife and daughter. Fletcher's definition of tragicomedy will do for setting out the frame of mind of the jealous protagonists toward the object of jealousy: it "wants deaths, which is enough to make no tragedy, yet brings some near it, which is enough to make it no comedy."[18] Jealousy is a self-blocking and self-limiting form of anger, which injures most that which sustains it, its own love, and differs from the competitive or paternal jealousy of the senex. Actually, it is only after Posthumous grows in experience and wisdom, Leontes joyfully accepts his new-found role as parent and advisor to Polyxenes and Perdita, and Prospero has had twelve years to reflect on his dereliction (or perhaps abdication) from his everyday responsibilities as Duke of Milan, that the anger moderates into something approaching a husband's or father's responsibility.

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[17] C.L. Barber's illuminating analysis of Pericles reveals the characters of Antiochus and Simonides to be different sides of one personality, and he sees the play as a way of dramatizing and resolving the unconscious fears of any suitor towards a marriageable woman.

The female protagonists do not succeed, or perhaps are not redeemed from the throes of their jealousy, at least not in the Romances: Dionyza dies by fire and Cymbeline's wicked queen takes her own life in frustrated despair. In general, the ambitious and the jealous among Shakespeare's women meet their destruction, or if they do not suffer a fate that severe, they are rebuked for their jealousy, as is the case as early as The Comedy of Errors. Katharine is rebuked for her jealous shrewishness in The Taming of the Shrew, and Titania must give in to her husband's will if she is to restore marital harmony (no matter how it is accomplished) in A Midsummer Night's Dream. And Isabella must give up her chastity if she is to gain a full measure of humanity. The most jealous women are in the tragedies, of course; Lady Macbeth represses her feminine side so her husband can realize his ambition for a crown, and her jealous watch over his career signals the end of her peace of mind. Goneril and Regan destroy others in a murderous rivalry for Edmund, and Cleopatra jealously competes with Antony's Roman empire for his devotion, and wins; she is the only woman in Shakespeare whose jealousy for her husband is completely redeemed.

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[18] Harbage. "Forward: The Romances." The Complete Pelican Shakespeare, ed. Alfred Harbage, New York: Viking Press, 1975, p. 1257.

In the Romances the male protagonists are forgiven their jealousy and eventually forgiven for the harm they attempt to do to their wives. The "themes of transgression, expiation, and redemption"[19] are well known in the Romances, but perhaps less well known is the fact that jealousy for Shakespeare's males is normally destructive, while jealousy for Shakespeare's females is usually self-destructive, or threatens to be, the one spectacular exception being

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[19] Harbage, "Forward," p. 1257.

Othello. The consequences of male jealousy are mitigated and repaired by the forgiveness of the women. The *senex* jealousy in *Pericles* displaces the jealousy of the husband, but in *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* (1611) the jealous husband takes center stage. Male jealousy reaches an intensity and destructive force beyond which is peace and a proper *senex*-suitor relationship in *The Tempest*, the destructive force of male jealousy having been expiated in *The Winter's Tale*.

The isolation of jealousy in *The Winter's Tale* puts Leontes in the midst of an illusion as tenacious and nightmarish as Othello's, as central to his half of the play as Bottom's profound dreams, where the brief contact between the fairy world and the Athenian mechanical's world creates something both illusory and tangible, like an island forming solid and humble between the elements of sea and air, in which imagination forms and dissolves its creations. Leontes is as mistaken as Hermione tells him he is, when she says she exists only "in the level of your dreams" (*WT*.III.ii.80), and no longer as a wife and mother.

Leontes becomes a *senex iratus* against his own marriage, standing guard between his fears and his wife, as egregious a variation of the protecting male figure as Shakespeare ever creates; the Christian and the Freudian interpretations of his jealousy are very similar, both seeing it as a projection of his own feelings on his wife and childhood friend, in the first case as a sense of sin, in the second as sexual repression, but both as a false method of protecting himself from his own fears. Shakespeare's intuitions into the brokenness of the human condition as it is reflected in human psychology are expressed in the way he presents familial relationships, in this case, the way he presents us with a variation on the role of the senex; and they do very well to express in drama the abstract symbolic language we read in studies of human psychology. Where else do we get a successful dramatization of a man trying to protect his conception of innocence from a wife whom he fears as one who represents all the frailty of the human condition? In a sense, he tries to protect the sanctity of his marriage from his wife, a truly impossible task, but a role of protecting innocence which the senex usually plays. A close parallel to Leontes' jealous rage is the strange rage of Polixenes towards Perdita, a mixture of snobbery and jealousy and fear, and one in which the senex role is again reversed to protect the son, not the daughter:

> -And thou, fresh piece
> Of excellent witchcraft . . .
> (IV.iv.415-16)
>
> I'll have thy beauty scratched with briers, and made
> More homely than thy state . . .
> (IV.iv.418-19)
>
> . . . -if ever henceforth thou
> These rural latches to his entrance open,
> Or hoop his body more with thy embraces,
> I will devise a death as cruel for thee
> As thou art tender to't.
> (IV.iv. 430-34)

The right relationship is restored, but we do not see an undamaged senex relationship presented on stage until The Tempest (1611), where a normal senex, Prospero, appears. If The Tempest is Shakespeare's last comedy, it is also the last play to go over the ground where the senex figures importantly, and without complications. Prospero is the grandfather of all senexes, all-powerful and merciful, but also a father who marries his daughter on time, to his daughter's choice, and with the promise of a happy and fruitful union in the future. Prospero gives up being a senex when he sets Ariel free and drowns his book and staff, content to become a father and a ruler in the human realm again, and he is in as much need of forgiveness as the next man. He sheds the role of all-powerful senex at the same time he takes off his magician's robes and sets sail for Milan, where the powerlessness of ordinary life will be his lot.

III. Real and Imaginary Blocks: In the Service of Love: A Comparison of *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merchant of Venice*

The Taming of the Shrew and *The Merchant of Venice* belong to Shakespeare's early comedy period. The two plays are alike in their subordination of character to theme and in their deliberate simplification of the usual depth and complexity of Shakespearean character to comic purposes: Katharine's famous (and much-detested) speech about the duties of a wife at the end of *The Taming of the Shrew* (V.ii. 1441-184) blurs the outlines of a more complex character at a crucial point in the play, as does Shylock's obsessively repetitious clowning about his "ducats" and his "daughter" at a similarly crucial point in *The Merchant of Venice.*

In both plays Shakespeare sacrificed full and rounded characterizations to the themes of each play, in the earlier play to the need for taming all shrewish wives, and in the later play to the bloody-mindedness of all usurers. In Shakespeare's early comedies his important characters are often subordinated to the themes of the plays. For example, Falstaff is subordinated to the theme of love in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and Valentine's romantic love for Silvia is subordinated to the theme of friendship in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The simplification of character is not so much deliberate on Shakespeare's part as it is necessary to make the exposition of comic theme complete. If tragedy reveals unexpected depths of character, comedy should do the opposite, revealing the obvious, the superficial, and the repetitious--and it does. From Aristotle to Bergson the critics of comedy remind us that comic characters are predictable, typical, and repetitious. Indeed, Bergson bases his theory of the comic on the principle of the mechanical encrusted on what should be the supple and the human, which puts into a comic principle what has been a characteristic of comedy from the time of Greek New comedy.[1]

Shakespeare's comic protagonists develop rapidly into characters which are the opposite of the Bergsonian comic character, becoming graceful, emotionally expressive, and in some ways unpredictable, as are Shakespeare's comic heroines in all his plays from about 1598 onward, but not always true of the characters in his early comedies. Obsessions are easy to spot in characters like Malvolio and Parolles but less easy to identify in comic protagonists in the early plays; Shakespeare had not yet freed himself from the domination of plot and theme over character in The Taming of the Shrew and The Merchant of Venice either, although three or four years of dramatic composition had brought him much closer in the latter play. Perhaps part of the controversy surrounding the treatment of Shylock as character in a particular comic world concerns what Shakespeare was able to do in that play: shake it loose from an internal tragic threat and deliver it to a free and easy last act, in which the threat from Shylock's legal obsession vanishes completely.

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[1] Or we suppose as much, because the plots of Greek New comedy are not extant except in Plautine and Terentian Roman comedy. Bergson's theory does not work for Greek old comedy; the mechanically repetitious in politics and society is what Aristophanes' comic protagonists seek to avoid; from the independent niches they successfully establish they banish the rigid and unchanging aspects of a society they have escaped, whether it be war or taxation or a ridiculous philosophy, the case with Aristophanes' The Clouds.

Katherine and Shylock are blocking characters who head in different directions, Kate towards the more flexible, playful, and forgiving nature of Shakespeare's later comic heroines, and Shylock to a comically deterministic dead end, all his passion and humanity gone over to his quest for revenge. This makes him so completely a part of his personal plot that he can no longer be distinguished from it. Can we, however, make this statement when we know full well that Shylock lives as one of Shakespeare's most human characters? We must remember that Shylock establishes his human qualities first; in fact, he is the only character to speak for them. In the early part of the play, the rest of the merchant-world of Venice speaks of him with scorn or derisive laughter, so Shylock must express his human vulnerability and, when the opportunity presents itself, leap at the chance to gain a mortal revenge over his most implacable competitor, Antonio, the man who lends out money gratis:

> TUBAL But Antonio is certainly undone.
> SHYLOCK Nay, that's true, that's very true. Go,
> Tubal, fee me an officer; bespeak him a
> fortnight before. I will have the heart of

> him if he forfeit, for were he out of
> Venice I can make what merchandise I will.
> (III.i.109-113)

Just before Shylock sets himself in motion with his plan of revenge, he expresses the reason for this revenge; it is the endless torment to which Antonio has subjected him, and the human emotions he has had to forget in order to make a living:

> SHYLOCK Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands,
> organs, dimensions, senses, affections,
> passions? - fed with the same food, hurt
> with the same weapons, subject to the same
> diseases, healed by the same means, warmed
> and cooled by the same winter and summer
> as a Christian is?
> (III.i.51-56)

Yet, as a blocking character, Shylock has trapped himself in a contradiction: if he expresses his own vulnerable humanness as a reason for revenge, then he must recognize Antonio's vulnerable humanness too, the same humanness Shylock has said he is a part of. Shylock, however, becomes blind himself to the recognition that he would injure and kill Antonio through the same vulnerability he shares with him, which has made him suffer from Antonio's active contempt. Shylock also forgets that the flesh that suffers and dies has not been killed by Antonio; he is feelingly aware that he has suffered, but he forgets that he must be alive to do so. If he shares vulnerability with Antonio, he must also share life, and Portia makes sure that Shylock does share life.

Portia prevents Shylock from having his revenge by invoking the strict letter of the law; with the refusal to Shylock of a "jot of blood," Portia presents Shylock with a profoundly comic reminder that we are "of one flesh." Ironically, Shylock can only be reminded of his enemy's humanness by the presentation of his enemy's humanness to him. Portia presents Shylock a block which simply cannot be gotten around. To Shylock, revenge is revenge, as it would be to many another man, whether Christian or Jew, as Shylock so accurately says, and he ignores the fact that his brand of justice will be fatal when he pursues justice according to the "law." Portia knows the nature of the antagonist she counter-blocks; when Shylock is confronted with his own vulnerability (his own mention of which has made him a character who inspires great sympathy and one who has possible tragic dimensions), he meets with a justice which is tailored to his own particular hybris, a hybris which comically overreaches in its pursuit of justice. In the Shakespearean comic world, if death can be prevented it will be, and the fact that Shylock has some justification for the way he feels does not prevent this principle from working.

What is left for Shylock after he has been "forgiven" twice, once by the Duke, by a prior forgiveness which is the heritage of all Christians, and once by Antonio who returns his half of Shylock's fortune to him, provided it is willed to Jessica and Lorenzo when Shylock dies, is a broken comic antagonist, defeated by his enemies and with all his fortune promised to the man who has stolen his daughter out of his house. The living Shylock, now much diminished in the financial power, even independence he previously possessed, exits at the end of the trial, a victim of one of the most unpleasant and disturbing "forgivenesses" in Christendom.

The critical controversy is not about the blocking of Shylock's revenge, but instead about the dramatic portrayal of Shylock's feelings as a father; Shakespeare at this point in his dramatic career has chosen plot and theme over fullness of comic characterization with the character of Shylock but only just; Shylock's character has been comically blurred, sacrificed as it were, to the rigidity of the comic conception of a usurer bent on revenge, and this abstracting of the full humanity of one of Shakespeare's most powerful comic blocking characters has led to endless controversy. Shylock can be "forgiven" for the way he is because Shylock's deepest feeling, his love for his daughter Jessica, is skated over at a point in the play when Shylock should be experiencing his sharpest pangs of grief:

> SOLANIO I never heard a passion so confused,
> So strange, outrageous, and so variable
> As the dog Jew did utter in the streets:
> 'My daughter! O my ducats! O my daughter!
> Fled with a Christian! O my Christian ducats!
> Justice! the law! my ducats and my daughter!
> (II.viii. 12-17)

We must take Solanio's word for it that that was what Shylock said, yet Shylock's own words are truer to the sudden expression of bitterness a father might feel:[2]

> I would my daughter were dead at my foot
> and the jewels in her ear! Would she were
> hearsed at my foot, and the ducats in her
> coffin!
>
> (III.i.79-81)

The elegant bitterness of Shylock's exclamation would no more be a literal wish than that of any other father; it would, however, be the expression of deep feelings severely wounded. Nevertheless, when Shakespeare has to build a "forgiveness" around Act IV, he takes Solanio's narration of Shylock's reaction to his daughter's elopement as the true version of Shylock's feelings, accepting as a given the comic and superficial rather than the human and the tragic, and then writes Shylock out of the play. Shakespeare had to make a choice, and his choice of one version of Shylock's deepest pain has led to critical controversy ever since.

Through Portia, Shakespeare reminds us that Shylock shares the human vulnerability of the flesh with his greatest adversary, Antonio, but then Shakespeare forgets for a crucial moment the blindness and bias of Shylock's Christian enemies; or, if not quite that, then Shakespeare must trick us into forgetting the comic prejudice of Shylock's Christian adversaries and convince us against our better judgement that the solving of the Shylock dilemma is a tidy and simple one because all of Shylock's responses are comic. Surely Shakespeare would be aware of the unresolved nature of the ending of The Merchant of Venice and would also be aware of the heartlessness of the ending, even though he knew Shylock had to be prevented from his revenge for the sake of the comedy.

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[2] C.L. Barber recognizes the Bergsonian comic obsession of this scene, and accepts it at face value, an interpretation which differs from mine.

Perhaps that is the point: Christian resolutions have simpler and cleaner lines to them than the dilemmas they solve--often the resolutions of Christianity are quixotic and forward-moving, finding resolutions which are simpler than we might otherwise expect, finding (as Shakespearean comedy does also) complete answers in reconciliations and acceptance in comic endings. After all, Shylock's soul has been saved at the last, in spite of himself. Is it possible that the comic resolution of The Merchant of Venice has to be accepted on faith as well as on comic instinct? If the happiness of not quite all the characters has been assured, the safety of all of them has been.

Can we reconcile Shylock's forgiveness with the character of Shylock? That depends on which version of the character we accept: the comic figure who equates his daughter with his ducats and bobs up and down with nervous anxiety over the loss of anything which is his, or the father who feels his daughter's abandonment so intensely that he bitterly disowns her and his riches at the same time. The second version seems more reliable--we have Shylock's words for it, not only those of Solanio, who, like

Gratiano, "speaks an infinite deal of nothing." If we accept the first version, Shylock's forgiveness seems generous; his ducats are everything he values, and he has gotten half of them back. If we accept the second version, his situation seems close to tragedy; he has lost his daughter, and his riches mean nothing in comparison to her. He does not wish to be destitute, but his answer to the Duke's expropriation is impatient sarcasm, not pleading:

> Nay, take my life and all! Pardon not that!
> You take away my house when you do take the prop
> That doth sustain my house. You take my life
> When you do take the means whereby I live.
> (IV.i.372-5)

Father-daughter relationships are the core of the later Romances, but the romances are not sundered into two parts, as this play is. The older form of comedy, which Shakespeare is not yet free of, with its deliberate simplification of character lines and the exploding of the _senex_ off the stage, ultimately determines how Shylock will be regarded by the rest of the comic community, whether Christian or not. We are charmed and our hearts are warmed by the reconciliations and reunions of father and daughter in the Romances, but in _The Merchant of Venice_ we are distressed by the separation of father and daughter, socially justified as it may seem to be. We should, or perhaps we want to say that the defeat of Shylock brings a Christian version of what Frye calls "The Myth of Deliverance" concerning other comedies: with an imminent danger past, we expect a return to a more perfected and perfectible life, and Act V hints at the neighborly harmony of the spheres when we see Jessica and Lorenzo under the starry night imagining what it would be like to hear the sphere of the fixed stars turning in a perfectly ordered universe.[3]

Starlight, music, space are the counterpoint to the wide-ranging profit-seeking ships on the oceans of the world, extending the adventurous curiosity and risk-taking of the merchant-princes Antonio represents. Even the shipwreck Salerio imagines as a worry to Antonio is free-flowing and feminine:

> SALERIO . . . Should I go to church
> And see the holy edifice of stone
> And not bethink me straight of dangerous rocks,
> Which touching but my gentle vessel's side
> Would scatter all her spices on the stream,
> Enrobe the roaring waters with my silks--
> (I.i.29-34)

Portia's world at Belmont is not unlike the world which merchant-venturing Salerio opens to the reader's imagination at the beginning of the play.[4] Both are spacious and generous and unconcerned about wealth or the source of it, the proper attitude to riches as far as the comic world is concerned; Shylock seems more concerned with sure profits and sure victims, which in comic terms at least would justify the comic justice of the loss to him of everything of value. Shakespeare can have it both ways in this play: Shylock is the most severe threat to the integrity of the comic world and more consistently frustrated in his ambitions than any other blocking character in Shakespeare's comedies, but he nevertheless establishes the reasons for his antagonism towards his enemies, and the bitter eloquence he uses to conduct his own defense will not let us forget those reasons.

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[3] Northrop Frye, The Myth of Deliverance, "Introduction," passim.

[4] Richard III speaks of Elizabeth's womb as a "nest of spicery" (RIII.IV. iv. 424), though to woo yet another woman whose father he has butchered, but the allusion strengthens the feminine connotations of the shipwreck Salerio describes in Act I of The Merchant of Venice.

Portia's bounty expresses itself in Good Samaritan-like generosity which is as limitless as the confidence in wealth and risk-taking which the great merchants of Venice possess. Like Antonio, she has no anxiety about the security of her wealth, and like both Antonio and Bassanio, she would have little anxiety about the loss of it. At this point Shylock and his Christian antagonists touch; Shylock values other things more than money. But Shylock narrowly focuses on revenge. Portia grows in confidence and assurance to become the architectus of the comic action after she has been won by Bassanio, as if she were in bondage to her own beauty and potentially corrupting riches before she is chosen. Portia personifies the kind of love Juliet speaks of in Romeo and Juliet: "My bounty is as boundless as the sea/ My love as deep."[5] She can bring back uncounted riches from the latitude of her own generous spirit. Bassanio stakes his entire future married life on the terra incognita of her generous spirit and wins. With the winning of Portia's hand in marriage, his ship comes in, carrying spiritual as well as material treasure.

Jessica attempts the same kind of boundless generosity when she brings a dowry to Lorenzo, but the newly-married couple may spend too lavishly from a limited treasure chest, and they require half of Shylock's fortune to keep them going at the end of the play, a hint that Portia is not only wealthier but also richer in gifts of the spirit; she, like other Shakespearean heroines, is the source of wealth in others as well as a possessor of her own. She is the one who transmits news of Antonio's recouped fortunes:

> Unseal this letter soon;
> There you shall find three of your argosies
> Are richly come to harbour suddenly.
> You shall not know by what strange accident
> I chanced on this letter.
> (V.i. 273-7)

We do not question Portia's sources either. In a biblical context, we are reminded of St. Paul's assurance to his parishioners that there will always be enough, that God will provide,[6] and indeed, there seems to be divinity in the confidence and generosity of Portia's role in The Merchant of Venice.

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[5] This interpretation follows closely the spirit of John Russell Brown's brilliant chapter on The Merchant of Venice, "Love's Wealth and the Judgement of The Merchant of Venice," in Shakespeare and his Comedies, London: Methuen & Co., 1957, pp. 45-82.

Like Portia, Petruchio in The Taming of the Shrew, attempts to defend the comedy world against a comic antagonist and succeeds in reconciling Kate to her inevitable and desired role as wife to the roughshod Petruchio. The deeper pattern of the comedy reveals a reconciliation which, with slight changes, would turn us to Shakespeare's wonderful reconciliation of Beatrice to her future role as a married woman and her abandonment of her role as a wit-adversary. We have no doubt that Beatrice wants to be married, and her swift transition from a cheerful girl to a woman in love, yet one who is at the same time outraged by the defaming of her cousin Hero, causes us to trust Beatrice's emotions. We never have that kind of dramatic emotional assurance with Katharine, so we make accurate assessments of her emotional desires from her cries for help.

Shylock nearly destroys the not-so-convincing comic happiness at the end of The Merchant of Venice. His threat to Antonio would turn tragedy to comedy, and paradoxically, his pathos after the threat is banished does not allow an audience to rest from uneasiness, no matter what means

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[6] II Corinthians 8 and 9; Paul pursues the theme of giving and the paradox of God's abundance to the giver (KJV, pp. 159-60).

Shakespeare uses to meliorate Shylock's potentially tragic destructiveness. It is instructive that Portia, the happy, wealthy maiden with the most disinterested motives in the controversy, is the character he chooses to swing the plot back to comedy. Portia is the most moderate choice available to Shakespeare, and she is the comic counterpart to the rigidity and obsessional characteristics of Katharine, who must be taught to be more like Portia, the woman she becomes more like at the end of The Taming of the Shrew.

Where Shylock becomes more brittle and obsessed with revenge, Katharine becomes less "froward" and a little more forward in expressing love towards her husband, a learning process which may seem like condescension to feminists, but nevertheless deals with the emotional realities Shakespeare presents to us in the character of Katharine.

Katharine's calls for attention are more potentially reconcilable than Shylock's actions, which reveal a wary and suspicious independence from the Christian community in Venice; many critics have noticed Katharine's jealousy of her sister Bianca's role as favorite child and of Bianca's role as favored (not feared) sister by Paduan suitors for her hand in marriage. Feminist critics of the play take issue with the method of Katharine's taming, which fits into a long anti-feminist tradition, and especially with the finished product, a reformed Katharine telling her sisters in womanhood that they owe obedience to their husbands, who do all the work to make sure their wives lead a soft life:

> Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,
> Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee
> And for thy maintenance; commits his body
> To painful labor both by sea and land,
> To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,
> Whilst thou li'st warm at home, secure and safe;
> (V.ii.151-6)

As we know now that most of the agricultural work, almost all of the child-rearing, and most of the low-paying work in the world is done by women, we find good reason for amusement over this portrait of a leisured gentleman's wife, but whether this were the portrait of a wife living in a comfortable merchant-class household or that of an aristocrat, the image would be inaccurate. Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst" gives us a contemporary, if somewhat elitist, portrait of the activities of an Elizabethan aristocratic house, and this evidence from literature suggests that a woman in a house with servants would have much work to do managing the household and seeing to the servants and family and guests. We can move a little closer, and find a more exact socio-economic portrait in the downstairs activity of the Capulet household preparing for a feast, a household which is part of the well-to-do merchant class:

> 1 SERVINGMAN Where's Potpan, that he helps not to
> take away? He shift a trencher! he
> scrape a trencher!
> 2 SERVINGMAN When good manners shall lie all in one
> or two men's hands, and they unwashed
> too, 'tis a foul thing.
> 1 SERVINGMAN Away with the joint-stools, remove the
> court-cupboard, look to the plate. Good
> thou, save me a piece of marchpane and,
> as thou loves me, let the porter let in

Susan Grindstone and Nell. [Exit second
Servingman.] Anthony and Potpan!
[Enter two more Servingmen]
3 SERVINGMAN Ay, boy, ready.
1 SERVINGMAN You are looked for and called for,
asked for and sought for, in the great
chamber.
4 SERVINGMAN We cannot be here and there too.
Cheerly, boys! Be brisk a while, and
the longer liver take all.
[Exeunt third and fourth Servingmen.]
Enter [Capulet, his Wife, Juliet, Tybalt,
Nurse, and] all the Guests and Gentlewomen to
the Maskers.
(*R. and J.* I.iv. 1-15)

This bustle of activity in the Capulet household, with the sudden entrance of those who do not do the domestic work, including Capulet's wife and daughter, would seem to strengthen Katharine's accusation, but two interesting observations emerge: the second servingman's call for cooperation among the friends of the servants to prepare the main room of the household for the feast, and the two girls who are to be let in, presumably as revellers but perhaps also to do their part in readying the chamber for the feast, which tells the reader that not all women have nothing to do. If Katharine pitches her capitulation speech to other women married to wealthy gentlemen, she leaves out the vast majority of women.

Although Katharine knows from hearing the marriage vows that she is married "for richer for poorer" and "for better for worse," experientially she still knows nothing about the long haul in marriage, or about marriage as help-mating when she makes her famous speech; she has just begun her married life, and that could help to explain the naivete of the speech. One of the qualities of her speech critics find galling is her gratitude for the methods of sensory deprivation which have tamed her; is this also naivete? No--Shakespeare makes the same choice for character simplification in The Taming of the Shrew he made three or four years later in The Merchant of Venice. Katharine has plenty of lively and individual character traits of her own, but as a character she still fits neatly into the theme of shrew-taming, and her reform is a dramatic temptation, an accepted form of comic behavior too easy for the dramatist Shakespeare to pass up. We can point to the seduction (rape) of the servant-girl in Terence's Eunuchus as a classical example of a woman being put in her place by a man, and to numerous examples of shrew-taming in Medieval and Renaissance literature to locate the tradition that made the character of Katharine easy for Shakespeare.[7] And yet, like Shylock, Katharine shows enough independence and humanity of her own to cause endless controversy about her taming among critics. So Katharine's desire to be married does not seem to be in question, and if that is a perfectly acceptable dramatic revelation about Beatrice in Much Ado, why should it be so difficult to accept the same revelation (though submerged) about Katharine? I think it is because only

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[7] Linda Woodbridge, Women and the English Renaissance, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984, pp. 13-139, passim.

Petruchio says what exactly the marriage will be like, and Katharine has no say in the matter. Beatrice's anger over Hero's treatment at the altar says a great deal about mutual respect in marriage, but Katharine has no say in her marriage. Critics assume Shakespeare's heart was with the female characters of his middle and later comedies and his tragedies, where women more often than not share tragic responsibility with their husbands. This implies that the really unforgivable trait about Kate is the no-holds barred nature of her loyalties: she either fights men with the first breath she takes, or she has nothing but praise for the role of the husband. Thus she has nothing to say even about the wife's role as helpmate, companion and equal partner, a role promulgated in the Renaissance since the time of Erasmus. In a word, she never learns; she remains the eternal rookie. Her worst action in the play is her hauling in the other women and lecturing to them how they must behave towards their husbands; we might assume that Bianca and Hortensio's widow are not happy with one who deserts the war and collaborates with the enemy.[8]

Where Shylock attempts to cross the boundary from comedy into tragedy with an action that would destroy the communal feeling of that comic world, Kate's only significant action is to get married, which from the outset makes her a part of the comedy world she had previously set herself against. The significant actions in the play are Petruchio's, and his early actions (at least) are brilliant. While Shylock attempts to carve his antagonism in Antonio's flesh, an action which would make his feelings irreconcilable and his actions irretrievable, Kate gives in to Petruchio's headlong wooing, which reconciles her *de facto* with her father's wishes, the wishes of all the suitors for Bianca's hand, and the fundamental wish of Katharine herself. If Petruchio's methods of "hawk-taming" are set aside for a moment, we notice how spectacularly he underscores the basic tenets of the marriage he has talked Kate into. He starts by describing her nature as the opposite of everyone else's first impression:

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[8] Juliet Dusinberre, Shakespeare and the Nature of Women, London: Macmillan, 1975.

> 'Twas told me you were rough and coy and sulllen,
> And now I find report a very liar,
> For thou art pleasant, gamesome, passing courteous,
> But slow in speech, yet sweet as springtime flowers.
> Thou canst not frown, thou canst not look askance,
> Nor bite the lip as angry wenches will,
> Nor hast thou pleasure to be cross in talk.
> (II.i.245-51)

Most of what he says about her (and some of it makes her seem a pretty and even-tempered woman) is accurate and true enough, but more importantly, Petruchio implies and denies the Pauline strictures for women, which are always in the background of shrew stereotypes: "slow in speech" in place of women who talk too much and in the wrong places; not "cross in talk," replacing the rebukes of women who have evil tongues. Wealth and respectable parentage and beauty are Kate's to begin with, which Petruchio immediately decides to make more obvious by emphasizing them. Kate's marriage will take care of the major anxiety of her life, as Petruchio is wise enough to know, and her married life, at least for a while, will become a kind of courtship. Whether Petruchio is really pursuing an illusion about Kate's nature, we do not know at this point, but he presents Kate with a far more important illusion, one which will take care of her violent jealousy of her sister's popularity; Petruchio presents himself as a competitor among other suitors for Kate's hand, and never relinquishes the illusion:

> Now Kate, I am a husband for your turn,
> For by this light whereby I see thy beauty--
> Thy beauty that doth make me like thee well--
> Thou must be married to no man but me.
> (II.i.274-7)
> Be patient, gentlemen, I choose her for myself
> And she and I be pleased, what's that to you?
> (II.i.304-5)

Petruchio not only keeps his promise of marriage to Kate, which is the important thing, but he changes the arrangements leading up to his world-without-end bargain. His wedding disguise comes across as a form of madness, a Quixotic madness with its pieced-together pretensions of something vaguely chivalrous and aristocratic. Petruchio tells us exactly what message he brings with his disguise, however:

> BAPTISTA But thus, I trust, you will not marry her?
> PETRUCHIO Good sooth, even thus. Therefore ha' done
> with words.

> To me she's married, not unto my clothes.
> Could I repair what she will bear in me
> As I can change these poor accoutrements,
> 'Twere well for Kate and better for myself.
> (III.ii.111-16)

Petruchio's sudden humility evokes the spiritual implications of marriage; marriage, according to "The Form of Solemnization of Matrimonie" in The Common Prayer Book (1547), repairs man's fallen condition and corrects his sinful state. Outer garments, even those of the flesh, are insignificant compared to the inward and spiritual state of man and woman who are married in front of God. In the eyes of the church, marriage is chastity, a life created in the image of the perfect marriage in Paradise. Petruchio is not just rationalizing when he says this; he really wishes it were so.

Petruchio keeps up the illusion of needing to protect his choice of bride against a legion of competitors, and bullies his way through the marriage ceremony. He steals the words from Kate's responses to the minister's questions, answering for her as if she and the vicar were opposed to the match:

> When the priest
> Did ask if Katharine should be his wife,
> 'Ay, by gogs-wouns,' quoth he, and swore so loud
> That all amazed, the priest let fall the book
> And as he stooped again to take it up,
> This mad-brained bridegroom took him such a cuff
> That down fell priest and book, and book and priest.
> 'Now, take them up,' quoth he, 'if any list.'
> TRANIO What said the wretch when he arose again?
> CREMIO Trembled and shook, forwhy he stamped and swore,

> As if the vicar meant to cozen him.
> (III.ii. 153-64)

Petruchio treats the vicar as imagined opposition, as if he were about to speak some "impediment" to the marriage at which he officiates. Petruchio's outrageousness parallels Lucentio's plans to steal a marriage with Bianca, so Kate gets treated the same way as her more popular sister; she gets stolen away in the midst of opposing competitors, which does its work as a compliment to Kate's particular sensitivity about her own desirability and the number of suitors for her hand in marriage. When Kate asserts her right to be the showpiece of the wedding feast, Petruchio counters by creating a whole crowd of importuning suitors who are about to steal her away on her wedding day, and then protects his bride from this illusory danger:

> And there she stands, touch her whoever dare,
> I'll bring mine action on the proudest he
> That stops my way in Padua. Grumio,
> Draw forth thy weapon, we are beset with thieves.
> Rescue thy mistress, if thou be a man.
> Fear not, sweet wench; they shall not touch thee,
> Kate.
> I'll buckler thee against a million.
> (III.ii. 229-235)

Kate wants to be desired, so, mad as Petruchio's behavior seems, she does not have much to complain about. Petruchio acts the bridegroom-Quixote, tilting at windmills, showing the impulse towards chivalry that only amazes the unprotesting spectators at the wedding feast and deepens the reality of the compliment toward Kate. If a woman's wedding day is her day, the most public and ceremonial of her life, then Petruchio's choice of that day to stake his claim for his wife's hand is not a bad one. He may be mad, but he is mad entirely for the sake of Kate.

The pedagogical aim of Petruchio's own contrariness in front of Kate is to bring her to a recognition of the plastic powers of the imagination, to allow her to see and speak of things in the best light and become an amiable companion to her husband. This is the lesser part of Petruchio's strategy. The establishment of mutuality in imagination for man and wife means that the emotions now have a way through. After Kate and Petruchio experience the novelty of merely being peace-loving citizens standing by at the brawling comic confusions of the two Vincentios, the real father and the imposter, Petruchio seals this newfound peace, using the same rules to obtain an obvious sign of affection from Kate:

> KATE Husband, let's follow, to see the end of this ado.
> PETRUCHIO First kiss me Kate, and we will.
> KATE What, in the midst of the street?
> PETRUCHIO What, art thou ashamed of me?
> KATE No sir, God forbid, but ashamed to kiss.
> PETRUCHIO Why, then, let's home again.
> [To Grumio] Come sirrah, let's away.
> KATE Nay, I will give thee a kiss. Now pray thee, love, stay.
> PETRUCHIO Is not this well? Come my sweet Kate
> Better once than never, for never's too late.
> (IV.i. 131-38)

Petruchio's strategy is a good strategy; Kate offers this token of affection to her husband, even though Petruchio has demanded it. Psychologists would call it demonstrativeness.

After Petruchio has won his bet, he and Kate attend her sister's wedding feast, which really consummates their marriage instead. The Taming of the Shrew is about the "frowardness" or defensive inhibitions of one particular character, Katharine Minolta, whose personality Shakespeare establishes early, more than it is about women in general. Bianca, and Hortensio's widow are more representative of women's independence in general than the reformed Kate, but we see no real danger of shrewishness on the horizon for their husbands, nor are their marriages in danger of ending or souring, either. The mutuality of the imagination Petruchio and Kate set down as a foundation to their marriage serves as the preface to genuine creativeness, and explains why the play ends with the consummation of their marriage.

By the end of Act IV, all evidence of Kate as a blocking character to the spirit of harmony and festive celebration of the three marriages in the play has been swept away, and Kate's lively sense of play in language has come to the fore. She understands that word-play from the beginning, since she puns and plays with the meanings of words all the time. The spirit of play in language helps to change her rough independence to mutual trust, which is the preface to genuine creativity in marriage. Creativity through the imagination, in agreement with another mind, is the prelude to the deeper mutual harmony full marriage rights bestow.

In this play, as in The Merchant of Venice, the marriages do not all take place at the end. Petruchio and Katharine, Lucentio and Bianca, Portia and Bassanio, Jessica and Lorenzo, and Nerissa and Gratiano all marry in the middle of their plays, and in both plays the consummation and the celebration of these marriages (with the exception of Jessica's and Lorenzo's) takes place at the end of the last act. A Midsummer Night's Dream gives us a "marriage" plot outline of the middle comedies Much Ado, As You Like It, and Twelfth Night (more or less), plays in which the marriages take place at the end of the play. A Midsummer NIght's Dream is the forerunner of the middle comedies. It shares with the later three comedies the characteristics of delayed marriages, extended courtship of the comic heroine and her romantic lead, an absence of serious emotional difficulties during the courtship, and the absence of serious blocking characters to marriage. Serious blocks to marriage recur in the "Problem" Comedies and the Romances, whether the blocks are internal or external.

In both The Taming of the Shrew and The Merchant of Venice Shakespeare's deliberate choice of simplified comic outlines in the characters of Kate and Shylock, at the expense of the complexity of the issues of usury and antifeminist stereotypes for the sake of easy comic resolutions to these problems, creates figures of enduring humanity and endless critical controversy. In my opinion, the simplified comic outline of Kate is less a crux than the conflicting character outlines of Shylock, just as the threat of an ungenerous spirit in the comic world of a Shakespearean comedy would be a more serious threat than a blocking character who is both unaware of her threat and potentially reconcilable and creative, as Kate is. Shylock becomes indistinguishable from his plot, and, like a Jonson character, his worse traits cease to exist after his plot is destroyed. Conversely, Kate joins the comedy world with her marriage and then learns how to accommodate herself to it, helped with the emotional common sense Petruchio teaches her.

Comic blocking characters bring retribution on themselves when too much of themselves is devoted to some specific action meant to destroy the comic world around them, or to destroy competitors in that comic world. Comedy is a world of wit in action, not disastrously committed action itself; Malvolio and Parolles meet with their own forms of retribution because they show signs of wanting to damage the integrity of their comic worlds. Malvolio wants to destroy the reputation of Feste the clown and repress spirit and energy in Olivia's household. Parolles helps to prevent the consummation of Helena's marriage and persuades Bertram to run away from his ancestral home and his wife to the wars, so he deserves his punishment.

Shakespeare created more fully human and sympathetic characters in his middle comedies, but the extraordinary thing about his two most controversial comic creations, Katharine and Shylock, is how enduringly human he made them and how long they are remembered because of the way readers and critics want them to be. As Charlton and Wilson point out so well, Shakespeare's middle comedy figures are the way we want all Shakespeare's comic heroines to be, characters of sweetness, wit, and charm, and, in the opinions of these two critics, the culmination of Shakespeare's comic genius. The absence of serous blocking characters in these plays, with the exception of Malvolio, who is much more easily defeated than Shylock, tells us much about the kind of comedy evolving in Shakespeare's mind, a comedy which in harmonious spirit and absence of too predictable comic abstractions of character has no equals.

IV. The Middle Comedies: The Comic Antagonist from Social Climber to Shadow

Malvolio is the centerpiece of Shakespeare's romantic comedies of the middle period, those comedies written around 1600: As You Like It, Much Ado About Nothing, Twelfth Night, and The Merry Wives of Windsor.[1] Among all the comic antagonists of the middle comedies, Don John, Conrade and Borachio of Much Ado, Jaques, Duke Frederick and Oliver of As You Like It, Falstaff of The Merry Wives, and Malvolio of Twelfth Night, Malvolio's pretensions tower over the group and establish him as the most enduring comic antagonist and comic butt. Falstaff is out of character, and more important, out of his element in the pastoral virtue of Merry Wives. The Falstaff of the Henry IV plays has no pretensions to sexual virtue and thrives in the tavern environment of Eastcheap, which is his natural environment. Malvolio, on the other hand, grows like a weed in Olivia's solemn household until he is chopped down by a small group of determined revellers, who keep the candles burning below-stairs during Olivia's over-extended mourning for her dead brother.

In Much Ado the comic antagonists are less developed as characters. Don John and his companions are funny in their stereotypical villainy, well-matched by the incompetent competence of Dogberry and his crew. In As You Like It, on the other hand, Jaques and the "bad" brothers Duke Frederick and Oliver have only a short-lived effect on the cheerful tone of their play, and Jaques himself is more a representative of a philosophically negative stance than he is an actual comic antagonist. Jaques and Malvolio are the two most interesting of the middle comedies' comic antagonists.

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[1] Dating follows Geoffrey Bullough: The Merry Wives of Windsor 1597-1602 (pp. 3-4); Much Ado About Nothing 1600 (p. 61); As You Like It 1598-1600 (p. 143); Twelfth Night 1600-1602) (p. 269).

I will begin with The Merry Wives of Windsor. Falstaff's existence as a privileged parasite in the Henry IV plays vanishes in Merry Wives, where he is forced to use his wits against characters of determined middle class virtue, Mistress Page and Mistress Ford. It seems out of character for Falstaff to be scheming to break down their virtue. Here, he tries to function in an atmosphere of village and country, a close approximation to Justice Shallow's rural pastoralism in Henry IV, Part II, which Falstaff had previously looked on with boredom and contempt.

Falstaff and Malvolio both unwittingly do their part to carry away the negative emotions of their plays: Falstaff carries away the jealousy and suspicion of Master Ford in a comic exorcism of river-dumping, beating, and being pinched black and blue for unclean desires.[2] Malvolio does his part, too, "carrying" away the perplexing helplessness of relatives and friends towards Olivia's ritualized and extended mourning. Unlike Falstaff, Malvolio is unaware of his comic function and speaks no soliloquies about it, which makes the comic revenge against him all the more pleasant.

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[2] Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p.183.

Falstaff is punished for his opportunistic lust, which is not very convincing. In Twelfth Night Malvolio is punished more severely for his self-confessed (and overheard) opportunism. Sherman Hawkins correctly says that Twelfth Night needs the intrusion of strangers to break it free from its deadlock between the grieving Olivia and the languid and indulgent Orsino,[3] which is the function Viola and Sebastian fulfill, but a comedy also needs a way to identify the pretentious and the feigned in an atmosphere where romance and feeling are of supreme value. Malvolio's exposure provides that opportunity. While Falstaff gladly gives up his pretensions to lust at the end of The Merry Wives of Windsor and is reconciled in a good-neighborly fashion into the Page and Ford households, Malvolio is required to give up his exposed ambitions, which is a more difficult thing for a comic antagonist to do.

In Henry IV, Part II, Falstaff has had a romantic interlude, where a tender and elegiac love scene takes place between Doll Tearsheet and himself. He speaks honestly for a moment to the whore who loves him, and seems on the verge of giving over his prodigal life. Doll is the kind of woman

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[3] Sherman Hawkins, "The Two Worlds of Shakespearean Comedy," Shakespeare Studies, Vol. 3, 1967, pp. 62-81.

Falstaff finds comfort with, and the scene invests her with the immortality of being a member of his tavern "family." The emotional honesty of this scene is apparent. Opposed to it are scenes in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* where the matron he pursues leads a virtuous life, which Falstaff misjudges so badly; it is as if in the Henry plays Falstaff is capable of love, but not in this play. Contrastingly, Malvolio remains timeless in his preoccupied ambitions, a small-time comic antagonist who makes the big time with his comic exposure.

Of course, Falstaff has nothing like the same political influence in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* that he has in the *Henry IV* plays. The play in which he is cast in an aggressive romantic role seems almost a penance for the *hubris* he has shown in *Henry IV*, *Parts I and II*. For example, in *Merry Wives*, Falstaff fails to provide for his Boar's Head family: he has to let Pistol, Nym, and Bardolph go, and he no longer has an adoring Mistress Quickly to furnish him with creature comforts. This Falstaff is sadly reduced in stature and influence from the comic dimensions he represented in the history plays.

Malvolio is a respecter of place and persons. His complaints to Sir Toby's small circle are the same in substance as Maria's, but he objects most from a scandalized consciousness that Sir Toby's revellers do not act in a manner befitting their rank and station in life:

> MARIA For the love o' God, peace!
> [Enter Malvolio]
> MALVOLIO My masters, are you mad? Or what are you?
> Have you no wit, manners, nor honesty, but
> to gabble like tinkers at this time of
> night? Do ye make an alehouse of my lady's
> house, that ye squeak out your coziers'
> catches without any mitigation or remorse
> of voice? Is there no respect of place,
> persons, nor time in you?
> TOBY We did keep time, sir, in our catches.
> Sneck up.
> (II.iii. 79-85)

Falstaff never is a respecter of rank and station, disastrously disrespectful at some points, but Malvolio is. Malvolio expects his betters in actual social status (but barely equals in his poorly concealed social ambitions) to act in a less lively manner. The implicit snobbery in his telling Sir Toby's circle to "remember who they are" is greeted with just as much resentment by Toby and Maria as characters in a Dekker or Greene comedy would have towards a killjoy, in plays where social and festive equality are the rule.

Malvolio verbally separates himself from tinkers and cobblers, a social gesture which violates the rule of radical equality which appears everywhere in Shakespearean comedy, the most richly comic example of which is Christopher Sly's elevation to lordship in The Taming of the Shrew. The Induction of this earlier comedy deals with the New Testament promise that every poor man will find his reward in heaven, that, when he awakes from a dream of powerlessness and poverty, he will be a lord, in a transcendant reality where he becomes the wonder of creation:

> LORD O noble lord, bethink thee of thy birth,
> Call home thy ancient thoughts from banishment
> And banish hence these abject lowly dreams
> Look how thy servants do attend on thee,
> Each in his office ready at thy beck.
> (The Taming of the Shrew, Ind.ii.28-34)

This is precisely the social elevation Malvolio would like to achieve as the husband of the Countess Olivia, in this world, not the next. Perhaps the reason The Taming of the Shrew has no epilogue is that Shakespeare did not have the heart to finish the joke on Christopher Sly, or perhaps the promise of equality was one Shakespeare meant to leave with his audience. At any rate, Sly is kept from pride by his lowly social station and is buffeted by poverty (he tries to bluff his way out of paying the Tavern bill). He is altogether a willing and humble man, ready to accept his sudden good fortune even if he is puzzled by it. His dilemma recalls to us the similarly puzzled willingness of Antipholus of Syracuse in The Comedy of Errors and anticipates that of Sebastian in Twelfth Night. Both characters are suddenly accosted by beautiful women, and accept their fate.

Malvolio has already dreamed fortunate dreams like these, and he has made them the focal point of his waking life and formed them into a premature reality to mesh with his social ambitions. He sees Olivia not so much as a woman as a means of social advancement and of revenge against Toby and his followers:

FABIAN . . . . Look how imagination
blows him.
MALVOLIO Having been three months married to her,
sitting in my state--
TOBY O for a stone-bow, to hit him in the eye!
MALVOLIO Calling my officers about me, in my branched
velvet gown; having come from a day-bed, where
I have left Olivia sleeping--
TOBY Fire and brimstone!
FABIAN O peace, peace!
MALVOLIO And then to have the humor of state; and after
a demure travel of regard, telling them I know
my place, as I would they should theirs, to
ask for my kinsman Toby--
(II.v.39-51)

The mystery of "one flesh" united in two, husband and wife, has a subordinate place in this daydream. Olivia is ancillary to Malvolio's new social position; Malvolio knows his "place" is deservedly a high one, and Olivia is merely a stepping stone to his ambition for ennoblement. Malvolio does not dream a dream of love but of power, and for this spiritual slighting of the "meaning" of genuine marriage he is punished. As cynical and callous as Falstaff is about human life in the Henry IV plays, he is never this callous about women and love even if he uses women to pay his debts and, in The Merry Wives of Windsor, would extort money from Mistresses Ford and Page if he could.

Malvolio also tries to discredit the "wise fool" Feste, an ambition Olivia reproves him for, which makes of Feste an enemy who is instrumental in exposing and humiliating

Malvolio.[4]

> Feste is not a critic of his environment, but a ring-leader, a Lord in Misrule . . . his only enemy is Malvolio the killjoy who takes himself too seriously and whose very virtues as a steward are vices in a world where nothing is of romantic value save romantic love and lusty revelling. Feste in proving Olivia to be the fool acts in accordance with the fool-societies. Feste sees the truth and is wiser than his betters.[5]

Feste becomes a healer of Olivia's inordinate grief; by telling her she is a "fool" to grieve for a brother who has gone to heaven, he helps to break the ritual bondage of grief which has made her reject suits of love and confined her to her house. Malvolio, however, serves a function he is unaware of; he has become a soothing asexual companion for a woman who has kept life and love at arm's length and uses Malvolio's presence to reinforce her determination to stay shut away from life. When Malvolio attacks a licensed fool who is far inferior to him in social status and security of worldly employment, an employment which Malvolio would take away from Feste if he could ("I marvel your ladyship takes delight in such a barren rascal" I.V.77), he has seriously transgressed a comic law: if possible, all are to be reconciled and included in a Shakespearean comic world. Malvolio should know better.

Malvolio speaks competence most of the time, but Feste speaks wisdom some of the time and helps to change the course of the play when he does. The compliment he delivers to Orsino ("thy mind is a very opal" II.iv.72-3.) highlights for the reader the unstable and shifting nature of Orsino's emotions, and gives us a clue to why Olivia cannot love him. Viola notices how skillful Feste is at reading the nature of the people whose sixpence he would have:

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[4] Leslie Hotson, Shakespeare's Motley, London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1952, p. 88.

[5] Enid Welsford, The Fool, Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1966, p. 254.

> This fellow is wise enough to play the fool,
> And to do that well craves a kind of wit.
> He must observe their mood on whom he jests,
> The quality of persons, and the time;
> And like the haggard, check at every feather
> That comes before his eye.
> (III.i.58-63)

Malvolio, though, is blind and numb to the real needs of Olivia; he simply has no notion of the spiritual and emotional repair she needs, whereas the Fool, as Enid Welsford says of fools in general, has an intuitive insight about the folly of Olivia's inordinate grieving.[6] Malvolio, however, spends the greatest part of the time thinking only of himself.

With the case for the prosecution established against Malvolio, we must at least approach to a rational explanation of his humiliation and exposure. The unalterable comic fact is that the plot against him is wonderfully funny, and he is such a wide and willing comic target that the temptation to use his pretensions against him is irresistible. That temptation is part of the comic mystery of the play, a glimpse at the mainspring of the mechanism of comedy overthrowing an oppressive order and re-establishing a comic and festive liberty.[7]

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[6] Enid Welsford, The Fool, Passim.

The "green world" comedies of As You Like It and Much Ado About Nothing have no comic antagonists so spectacularly funny and open to mimetic manipulation as is Malvolio. They are both the same kind of comedy, set free to some extent from the emphasis on plot in Shakespeare's earlier comedies, and peopled with characters who are less bound up in ritual behaviors and less subordinated to the expression of a comic theme or story-line. Nothing much in the way of comic antagonism happens in these plays: the victory over Malvolio is a spectacular comic success in Twelfth Night, but there are no similar comic victories in the two comedies that precede it.

The villain Don John in Much Ado seems a spontaneous outgrowth of malice towards the play's inevitable married happiness. His influence on the happiness of his play is no more than a passing shadow, even though the damage he causes to Hero's reputation seems extensive. Don John's mischief has a chance to work because Don Pedro and Claudio are willing to believe the worst about Hero, a point which several critics make. As a villain, Don John is a single version of the two bad brothers Oliver and Duke Frederick in

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[7] C.L.Barber, "Testing Courtesy and Humanity in Twelfth Night," Shakespeare's Festive Comedy, Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1968, pp.240-61.

As You Like It, which is slightly later. He stands against his brother in the Italian war in which Claudio wins glory.

Oliver and Duke Frederick are a doubled version of "bad" brothers, but Oliver is reconciled to his brother and to the ending of the play because he marries Celia, Rosalind's cousin. Frederick is changed from his villainous ways by a sudden conversion to the religious life, and he exits the play headed for monasticism, where Jaques will join him. All three villains, Don John of Much Ado and Oliver and Frederick of As You Like It, are gotten out of the comic protagonist's way quickly. Don John temporarily affects the outcome of the romantic core plot of his play, but Oliver and Duke Frederick only succeed in driving the romantic protagonists away to a "green world" exile, where the romantic complications are eventually solved.

But the villains and the melancholy and negative characters in As You Like It and Much Ado are less important than the clowns, who occupy the centers of these two comedies. Where in the earlier plays the clowns were personal servants (Launce, Speed, Lancelot Gobbo, Grumio), here the clowns change to licensed fools who are also companions to the female protagonists, or are comically involved with the protagonists' lives at some point in the play, as Feste is in Twelfth Night.

Rather than being tied to masters, as Lear's Fool is tied ~~to his~~ master, the clowns in the middle comedies are relatively independent. The clown as companion to a woman in mourning returns in the character of Lavatch in All's Well, then clowns disappear altogether until their return with the Shepherd's son in The Winter's Tale and the surly and rebellious servant figure of Caliban in The Tempest. Plots in Shakespeare's middle comedies follow a simple line: some characters are forced to leave an oppressive society and move somewhere else to start a new one. Middle comedies are sometimes Freudian constructions, in which sexual energy overthrows a sexually oppressive society,[8] an accurate description of Twelfth Night, but the rest of the middle comedies seem Aristophanic, following the typical Aristophanic plot of the comic protagonist going someplace new (eg.The Birds) or establishing a new comic world with radically new rules in the same spot (Lysistrata, Ecclesiaszusae).

The clown population (a classification which includes licensed fools) in Shakespeare changes with the changes that take place in Shakespeare's comedies; generally, the movement is away from the servant-clowns of the early comedies towards the satirical and licensed fools who are companions to ladies in As You Like It and All's Well, to the disappearance of clowns as companions in the Romances until the Shepherd's son in The Winter's Tale and Caliban in The Tempest, who are (more or less) stepbrothers to the romantic protagonists.

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[8] Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 214.

Feste is the freest-floating clown in Shakespeare, seemingly cut loose from Olivia's household by the grief which leaves all in a state of spiritual drift. Tied to neither Olivia's nor Orsino's house, he wanders between them and anywhere else his whims take him. Feste seems to have such liberty because the play needs all its five acts to become organized. If the central event of the middle comedies is falling in love, that event does not realistically happen until Olivia meets Viola's twin, Sebastian, in Act III of Twelfth Night; it happens much earlier in As You Like It, and the audience is prepared for it happening still earlier with Beatrice and Benedick in Much Ado. Feste is both the healer of grief and the exorciser of loveless ambition in his play, and the antagonism between Malvolio and Toby is not unlike that between Jaques and Orlando, where Orlando resents having his love examined and gladly says goodbye to Jaques' idle and somewhat ill-tempered scrutiny.

As You Like It lets all its characters be expansive about their attitudes toward love without penalizing them, even a comic antagonist like Jaques. Jaques finds himself less listened to in the "green world" than Touchstone, and he gradually writes himself out of the main action of the play because he chooses not to participate in the festive marriage conclusion, while Touchstone does. One could speculate that one of the links between the "happy comedies" and the problem comedies is the similarity of Touchstone's and Lavatch's reasons for marrying. Touchstone wishes to join the general condition of man who "hath his desires" (III.iii.70), but Lavatch is a Calvinist clown, gloomy about his own sexual desires and the salvation of mankind but determined to save himself:

> COUNTESS Tell me the reason why thou wilt marry.
> LAVATCH My poor body, madam requires it; I am
> driven on by the flesh; and he must needs
> go that the devil drives.
> (I.iii. 27-30)

Lavatch's answer to the Countess of Rousillon is that of any church parishioner and alludes to the warning in "The Forme of Solemnization of Matrimonie" that it is better to marry than to burn; there is nothing half-witted about Lavatch's dour answer to the Countess' genuine concern about the validity of his fitness for marriage.[9]

In Much Ado a deeper current of clownage also appears, one which we first saw with Mistress Quickly in the Henriad and Bottom in A Midsummer Night's Dream. The benign good-neighborliness, language-mangling, and easy-going spirit of play in ordinary talk of the clowns Dogberry and his crew establish a comic matrix which is part of Shakespeare's profound contribution to the genre. Much Ado has the best examples of all the clown population in Dogberry and his night watch, and As You Like It one of the best examples of the professional and licensed fool in Touchstone. Comic antagonists like Shylock are absent from both plays. In fact, there are no genuinely threatening or disruptive comic antagonists in these comedies. Malvolio may be famous for his pretensions and the imitative parody of the lover he is tricked into being, but he never seriously threatens the comic action of his play, and he is defeated in a much different way from Shylock. Because Malvolio is never a serious threat to his comic world, Twelfth Night, although potentially the darkest with grieving of the three plays (its atmosphere opens on mourning as does All's Well That Ends Well), remains a happy comedy.

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[9] Juliet Dusinberre, Shakespeare and the Nature of Women, London: Macmillan, 1975, p. 43.

The clown population takes over from the professional jester in Much Ado, and the night watch of Dogberry, Verges, and the rest of the constables on duty are famous for what they do not do. Their benign non-intervention in the life of the city aligns them with the clown population of so many of Shakespeare's plays, where profoundly sympathetic observers of comic or tragic action lend those actions an unqualifiedly sympathetic narrative that goes beyond the dramatically partisan emotions of the main plot characters. Hamlet was written at nearly the same time as the middle comedies, and the gravediggers are out of the same mold; they are simple men who do ordinary work and look on tragic action with ordinary emotions. The line of clowns extends to the unnamed clown carrying asps to Cleopatra, and on to the Shepherd and Shepherd's son in The Winter's Tale.

Perhaps the language-mangling, self-esteeming ordinariness of Dogberry and his watch point up one of the more unexplainable features of comedy plots themselves: when the watch mysteriously overlook the laws they are supposed to enforce, they represent another way of saying that in comedy everything works out for the best. In spite of the fact that Dogberry's constables prepare themselves to do nothing, they prove a curiously effective watch because they set out to do nothing.

Their scene (III.iii) immediately follows the "false" watch at Hero's window which is to introduce an impediment into the marriage ceremony at Claudio's and Hero's marriage the next day. The "real" watch catches two bragging villains, Conrade and Borachio, so the audience knows Hero's reputation will sooner or later be saved. There seems to be a point to the seeming contradiction of the course of action decided on during the conversation among the watch preceding the action, and the action itself: Dogberry and Verges prepare the watch for the venerable tradition of time-killing and cat-napping, to "comprehend all vagrum men," which in Dogberry's language-mangling is to be understood as letting the men they meet go in peace. Then the list of instructions for all occasions follows:

> DOGBERRY . . . Well you are to call at all the
> alehouses and bid those that are drunk to

> get them to bed.
> 2.WATCH How if they will not?
> DOGBERRY Why then, let them alone till they are
> sober. If they make you not then the better
> answer, you may say they are not the men you
> took them for.
> WATCH Well, sir.
> DOGBERRY If you meet a thief you may suspect him, by
> virtue of your office, to be no true man;
> and for such kind of men, the less you
> meddle or make with them, why the more is
> for your honesty.
> 2.WATCH If we know him to be a thief, shall we not
> lay hands on him?
> DOGBERRY Truly, by your office you may; but I think
> they that touch pitch will be defiled. The
> most peaceable way for you, if you do take a
> thief, is to let him show himself what he
> is, and steal out of your company.
> (III.iii.40-55)

And so on. Every wonderfully and snugly fitted excuse for not giving themselves trouble is supplied by Dogberry to make certain that the night passes peacefully. As an audience we are ready for the watch to do nothing, but then they arrest Conrade and Borachio, though they only dimly understand what the conspiracy is about:

> 1.Watch We charge you in the Prince's name stand!
> 2.Watch Call up the right master constable. We
> have here recovered the most dangerous piece
> of lechery that ever was known in the
> commonwealth.
> 1.Watch And one Deformed is one of them.
> (III.iii.52-57)

The "false" lechery of a "false" watch is apprehended by the "true" watch, which is true to the Prince's wedding party. "Deformed" is the slander which would steal Hero's chaste reputation, so the thief Deformed is truly apprehended too. It is this spirit of fortunate bumbling, with a core of some mysterious competence at the center, which keeps the happiness of the comic world of Much Ado secure and gives at least a hint of the comic spirit which defeats the spontaneous villainy of the play. The men in Dogberry's watch think well of themselves, want to think well of others, and do their duty, as if loving your neighbor as yourself were the instructions which motivated them all. Conrade and Borachio are subject to more of the same kindly language-mangling at the examination; after their crimes are described Dogberry supplies the forgiveness for their crimes:

> SEXTON What heard you him say else?
> 2.WATCH Marry, that he had received a thousand ducats of Don John for accusing the Lady Hero wrongfully.
> DOGBERRY Flat burglary as was ever committed.
> VERGES Yea, by the mass, that it is.
> SEXTON What else, fellow?
> 1.WATCH And that Count Claudio did mean, upon his words, to disgrace Hero before the whole assembly, and not marry her.
> DOGBERRY O villain! Thou wilt be condemned into everlasting redemption for this.
> (IV.ii.41-50)

In As You Like It Touchstone, the court fool, speaks his mild criticism of pastoral exile in much the same spirit: he is amiable towards the misplaced enthusiasm of Jaques for a fool's life, astute enough to bluff his way past the humble William when he thinks the rustic will be a rival for Audrey's hand, perfectly schooled in the diplomatic limits to the duelling code, a loyal companion to Rosalind, and enthusiastic enough about his self-imposed exile in the Forest of Arden to wish to stay and make a life as a plowman with Audrey, leaving the life of poses as a fool in Duke Frederick's original court. He will, with some modifications, become a householder and citizen, achieving the status Dogberry is so proud of, a householder who "hath had losses," and is used to having "everything handsome about him." Jaques predicts the marriage between Touchstone and Audrey will founder, being victualled for two months only, but any man equipped with the gentle and comprehensive ironies of Touchstone may be expected to find a way to adapt successfully to the life he chooses.

Of course, the lady Rosalind whom he serves presides over the romantic concerns of As You Like It with the same gentle ironies and good-natured self-mockery he shows. Critics marvel at the good nature of Touchstone, but his Celia and Rosalind must, by their example, direct him in the way to go and supply the sweetness that makes his natural humility so winning. Rosalind's unfeigned romantic ardor, which she mocks at the same time she is expressing it so transparently, and her boldness concerning all other romantic concerns in the play, make for the best possible expression of feeling and the fullest comic sensibility.

The comic antagonist in Much Ado is a sudden and spontaneous expression of self-justified villainy in the character of Don John, who is defeated by the equally buoyant good-neighbourly self-esteem of the night-watch crew in Messina. The comic antagonist, or antagonists, of As You

Like It are, on the other hand, the uncommitted or the unemotional, the first trait of which is the spirit of Jaques. Jaques expresses a schoolbook wisdom about the meaninglessness of existence in his famous "seven ages of man" speech; when Adam is carried on stage by Orlando immediately after, as an example of tender care for old age, the visual juxtapposition serves as a famous refutation of Jaques' speech.

Rosalind is the only character in the play to recognize exactly what Jaques has given up to attain his philosophical skepticism towards the rest of the world's romantic endeavors:

> ROSALIND A traveller! By my faith, you have great reason to be sad. I fear you have sold your own lands to see other men's. Then to have seen much and to have nothing is to have rich eyes and poor hands.
>
> JAQUES Yes, I have gained my experience.
>
> [Enter Orlando]
>
> ROSALIND And your experience makes you sad. I had rather have a fool to make me merry than experience to make me sad: and to travail for it too.
>
> ORLANDO Good day and happiness, dear Rosalind.
>
> JAQUES Nay then, God o' wi' you, and you talk in blank verse.
>
> ROSALIND Farewell, Monsieur Traveller. Look you lisp and wear strange suits, disable all the benefits of your own country, be out of love with your nativity, and almost chide God for making you that countenance you are; or I will scarce think you have swum in a gondello.
>
> (IV.i.19-34)

Rosalind deplores a man who will give up his birthright in return for a dubious prize, an understanding of other peoples and other customs which he can never call his own.

The joke at the hybrid dress of the Englishman we first hear in the conversation of Portia and Nerissa in The Merchant of Venice applies to the fundamental identity of Jaques and picks up some of the distinctions between "true men" and "false men" that we have seen in the conversation between Dogberry and his watch in Much Ado. Jaques' satirical feints provoke anger in other characters in the play (Duke Senior and Orlando), but in Rosalind he only inspires pity. She implies that he is a victim of a cultural cozening, trading the land and identity he was born with for nothing usable in return: in fact, spending himself poor to rid himself of a heritage that is his natural right.

In quite the opposite spirit, Dogberry is proud of his status as a householder in Messina, but Jaques has no place to call his own. Even in this dialogue, Orlando enters just at the moment Jaques is defending his life-style, and Rosalind's attention quickly shifts away, a reminder that Jaques' influence can be easily overlooked by the female protagonist when her real commitment to life enters. Jaques could be classified as the observer who has the power of action at his disposal but who refuses to do more than observe and comment when he should do more. His longing to be a fool is a longing to take over the licensed freedom of the fool to say anything, yet his status as a gentleman-follower of Duke Senior already gives him better privileges; the Duke's accusation of him as a former "libertine" nullifies Jaques' sought-for role as a satirist of society's sexual morals, but we have to remember there are plenty of other subjects Jaques could moralize about if he wanted to.

The rivalry between the Duke and Jaques in debate (Jaques avoids the Duke because the Duke is too anxious to argue with him) tells us that the Duke finds him entertaining, and perhaps already sees him in the role of court-jester, a role which it would seem Jaques does not really like. His attitude towards marriage changes in the course of the play, however; he keeps Touchstone from being married outside of church by the hedge-priest Sir Oliver Mar-text, preserving for Touchstone and Audrey the true "form" of matrimony. He is saving them as auditors for a clear setting-out of the duties of husband and wife in the marriage ceremony. The informal marriage ceremonies of the poor thus are not permitted to Touchstone and Audrey, as they also seem to be denied to most of Shakespeare's subplot characters. Jaques' intervention implies that Audrey deserves better.

Jaques is first a comic antagonist in his pretensions to moral superiority when he first enters As You Like It; then his pretensions to an aristocratic melancholy come forward in Act II, then he has pretensions to the license of the fool in Act II, and last he shows pretensions as a master of ceremonies in Act V, when he gives a blessing which closely imitates the blessing Hymen has already bestowed on the four couples coming to be married at the end of the play. Fundamentally, Jaques is less a comic antagonist than a pretender to certain roles which would make him a comic antagonist; what makes his character unusual is his pretension to several different poses throughout the play. He has the capacity to be a comic antagonist but for the most part is not.

His major personality trait, consistent melancholy, is assessed by Rosalind for what it is worth. It is laughed at by the Duke, and irritably tolerated and dismissed by Orlando. From a commentator on and critic of the action, Jaques could develop into a destructive force (like Iago) if he were truly jealous of what he saw, but he seems to be insulated from all personal envy by his conviction of superior sensitivity to everything observable. At the end of the play he is headed for an experiment with monasticism when he declares he will follow Duke Frederick into a hermitage. The chances he will stay there are hard to predict, but the fact remains that he chooses to leave the festivity before the end of the play.

In As You Like It, Touchstone and Jaques change places: Jaques becomes the self-exiled commentator and observer of society, where before he was a privileged gentleman follower of Duke Senior. At the same time Touchstone changes from a servant-outcast, the professional jester wearing motley, to a man who sets up a household for himself, ill-provisioned as it may be, just as a servant who leaves the household in which he serves to become a small farmer on his own might do.

Neither As You Like It nor Much Ado About Nothing has very serious comic antagonists. As You Like It has characters who are stock villains, rough and envious bad brothers, but their villainy is as quickly converted to good as it was devoted to bad. Jaques, on the other hand, is a greater threat than more obvious comic antagonists because he does not consider romantic endeavour, or any other emotions, worthwhile unless they take the form of fashionable melancholy. If Shakespeare had been less skillful at creating believable characters, Jaques might be seen as a creature out of a commonplace book, but as it is, he seems real enough to present an attitude inimical to the romantic pairing which drives the play. His attitudinizing, however, is never taken seriously, especially by Rosalind, who puts forward the love theme with more wit and clarity than anyone else and corrects the follies of more extreme romantic attitudes in the play. She is proof that love at first sight is not just a literary convention but a genuine occurrence, yet she corrects the extremes of the Petrarchan love convention by telling Phoebe to "sell where you can" (III.V.66) and give up her pose of flint-hearted Petrarchan mistress to Silvius. To love is to find a common and friendly ground between men and women. Rosalind asks for honesty and the dropping of poses on the part of all the characters in the play. She pities Jaques because she knows he has no love-match to talk about or to be corrected in. In Twelfth Night Orsino at least is on the right subject in his melancholy posings, but in As You Like It Jaques has no love other than love of self to learn to educate himself to.

The bad brother Oliver becomes an ally of love late in As You Like It, having been converted from envying the natural graces of his younger brother to a natural brotherly loyalty. He falls in love with Celia at first sight and marries her at the close of the play. Jaques never chooses a mate, and his attitude, so critical of all life's endeavors, could turn critical of love, too. Thersites, a foul-mouthed critic in Troilus and Cressida, is proof enough of a satirical consciousness which defiles everything it criticizes. Thersites' scurrility is not a chorus; instead, it darkens and worsens the already dark and pessimistic tone of the play. Because corruption in Troilus and Cressida is so general, Thersites can do little to change its course of events, but in his general condemnation, he can keep anything positive from taking root in a soil so poisoned with satirical loathing. This is precisely the role Jaques is kept from filling; he is not allowed to defile the gently ironic self-awareness of love so prevalent among the characters of As You Like It.

If Jaques is a potential threat to the gentle and easy acceptance of love's role in individual lives in As You Like It, Don John is a rather stereotyped and spontaneous villain in Much Ado About Nothing. As an envious bad brother in the same mold as Duke Frederick and Oliver, he remains unreconciled to the themes of love and marriage in his play, yet he is defeated by the divinely incompetent Dogberry and the night watch. Twelfth Night has a comic antagonist whose exposure is far funnier than the audience is willing to admit to itself: Malvolio attempts to join in with the lovers in his play, but for all the wrong reasons. Falstaff as a comic antagonist is far less formidable in The Merry Wives of Windsor, where he is defeated before he even begins his seduction scene by the honesty and sturdy matronly virtue of Mistresses Ford and Page. His scheme to extort money from them is badly planned, and based on the assumption that both matrons will fall in love with him, the same mistaken assumption Malvolio cherishes. In the comic scheme of things, pretentious lovers are more dangerous to the commonwealth of love than plain unvarnished villains, and are also in for rougher treatment at the hands of their comic dramatist, Shakespeare.

Blocking characters who are "influences" rather than outright comic villains are a general threat to the comic and romantic integrity of the middle comedies, which are a limpid medium and easily take on the discoloration of hostile attitudes. Their clowns, however, reflect the good-natured spirit of the middle comedies. Dogberry and his crew speak best for the good qualities of the ordinary citizen, and in their language-mangling they utter the fortunate paradoxes which form the underlying matrix of understanding and forgiveness of the middle comedies.

V. The Problem of Determining a Villain: Finding the Comic Antagonist in All's Well That Ends Well and Measure for Measure

One of the major problems of the "Problem Plays" is finding comic antagonists other than the pretentious miles Parolles in All's Well That Ends Well, in whose capture scene Parolles slanders everyone he has ever known or heard of in front of his soldier colleagues. Thereafter the reader has to resort to nice discriminations to identify comic antagonists. In fact, the Problem Plays are not designed to focus on particular comic antagonists as obstacles to happiness. The comic difficulties are too widespread to resolve dilemmas with the comic reconciliation or banishment of any one character. Parolles can be deflated, and is, before the end of All's Well, but that does not solve the problems which still confront Helena in her quest for married happiness. In Measure for Measure Vincentio has to solve three interlocking and deadlocked points of view represented by Angelo, Isabella, and Claudio, before the play can end with a semblance of happiness.

What distinguishes the Problem Plays from the happy comedies is not so much a lack of obstacles to comic happiness, but the prevailing and widespread inability of most of the characters to resolve their personal unhappiness without someone's intervention, either a character of great determination and faith, like Helena, who embodies the hopes of the Rousillon line, and thus frees it of the grief which has proved an obstacle to living for the future, or an apprentice-dramatist like Vincentio, who has complete control over his unhappy subjects, and must step in when they bring the play to an impasse with their passionately contested and deadlocked viewpoints.

All's Well That Ends Well is the easier play to solve by means of the exposure of the comic antagonists; the deflation of Parolles eventually leads to the exposure and redemption of Bertram, set going on the right course to married happiness when he loses the support of his bad advisor, who has made him deaf to the entreaties of those who are better, older, or wiser than himself. Something on the order of a simultaneous exposure of all three characters, Angelo, Isabella, and Claudio is necessary to free Measure for Measure for comic happiness.

Angelo does not quite fit the category of comic antagonist, although he does become ambitious during the course of the play, and he does exhibit extreme selfishness towards those he has power over. Angelo is an example of a comic antagonist who is redeemed rather than banished at the end of the play, but he is not a comic antagonist by choice, as are all other comic antagonists. He assumes his role as magistrate reluctantly, with misgivings about his ability not to misuse his power. These two Problem Plays are, then, more notable for the comic antagonism contained in them than they are for the comic antagonists they expose.

Parolles is in a direct line of miles gloriosus figures through Udall's Ralph Roister Doister on back to Terence's Thraso in The Eunuch. He has the energy and the empty pretensions of Ralph but is more of a threat to the romantic stability of Helena's marriage and Diana's virtue. Some critics find him a sympathetic figure, with the energy to get the play moving, and a character who speaks for marriage and procreation when he speaks against virginity to Helena.[1] The response to Parolles ranges from loathsome to lovable. Indeed, his only real crime is his willingness to slander his comrades-in-arms in battle, surely serious enough, but a crime whose seriousness is mitigated by the fact that his braggart pretensions are known to everybody on Parolles' side of the army except Bertram. Parolles cannot be a danger to anyone who knows who and what he is; his colleagues are insulated from his treachery because they know his nature.

Unlike Malvolio, Parolles' comic antagonism in All's Well That Ends Well is not an imitative rivalry of his betters ("conning great swaths of statecraft") nor a comically misplaced courtship of a woman who barely knows he is alive. Instead, Parolles has pretensions to the attitude of the soldier of fortune, who prefers war to women and casual liaisons with adoring females in faraway places to marriage. This way of life is well enough known, but excluded by Shakespeare from the lives of his real soldiers such as Othello, Antony, and Coriolanus. Antony's long personal discovery of a stable and enduring love with his Egyptian queen puts him in a transcendent space beyond the Roman attitude toward women as sexual and political pawns, and Othello and Coriolanus are models of monogamous virtue. Parolles assumes he knows how soldiers should live, but his fellow-officers put the lie to that for Parolles, and for Bertram too, when they deplore Bertram's attempted seduction of Diana.

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[1] J. Dennis Huston, "Some Stain of Soldier: The Function of Parolles in All's Well That Ends Well," Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol. 21 (1970), pp. 431-438.

> 1 LORD . . . The great dignity that his valor hath here acquired for him shall at home be encountered with a shape as ample.
> 2 LORD The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together; our virtues would be proud if our faults whipped them not, and our crimes would despair if they were not cherished by our virtue.
>
> (IV.iii.63-8)

Parolles reflects the crudest conception of soldiering: military glory and adoring females without the danger and the sacrifice of military endeavour or the commitment of a lasting relationship. By contrast, Othello has everything Parolles holds in contempt: a well-deserved reputation for military valor and a beautiful and virtuous wife. The best-known tragic antagonist in Elizabethan drama is Iago, and Parolles seems to be his much less clever and far less dangerous counterpart, a comic antagonist who is more pretentious than he is destructive. As far as tragic protagonists are concerned, the tragedy of Othello is a drama of scarcely hoped-for success of ambition and romantic dreams for both Othello and Iago, because Iago's dreams of destroying Othello's realized happiness do come true.[2]

Parolles' prime motive, on the other hand, is survival, not the destruction of a noble and trusting general. Parolles does destroy his own pretensions to be a worthy and valiant captain, yet he also reduces himself to a base note which he can live with. He is a military version of the comic overreacher in Jonsonian comedy. He wants to complete the impossible task of recovering a drum lost to the enemy, and afterward loses all rights to face the world with a martial image. A drum, as Paul Jorgenson tells us, is an empty noise-maker,[3] and Parolles' soldier-colleagues beat out this emptiness continually as they sound out all of his hollowness concerning military loyalty to his own side, and military courage under conditions of threatened death. Parolles proves to be the "drum" he has lost to the enemy, full of noise and empty of courage. Indeed, he is a drum which has been beaten on before, since Lafew and Helena already know him for a coward and a fool, and tell him as much to his face.

What other soldiers deplore most about Parolles is his influence on Bertram, yet Bertram has faults enough of his own. Parolles brings out the worst in him, and objectifies in his own character all the "problem" qualities of this drama, but with his exposure he justifies the continuing happiness the rest of the play promises. Parolles immediately takes advantage of the difficulties the Countess of Rousillon and Helena are in at the beginning of the play: he coaxes Bertram to go to the wars when his mother wants him to stay at home because he is all the family she has left, and he advises Helena to rid herself of her virginity when she is struggling with love and is desperate to find a way to marry Bertram. How to put forward the idea of love and marriage in an atmosphere of mourning and nostalgia for the good qualities of a generation now passed away is the problem which confronts Helena. Parolles shows indifference which amounts to contempt for her difficulties, and makes Helena's task much harder. He also lessens the influence the Countess has over her son, taking her place as advisor and counsellor.

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[2] This follows Bradley's thesis of Iago as a creative artist of the imagination, a character as malicious as his purpose is, in A.C. Bradley's Shakespearean Tragedy, Toronto: Macmillan, 1967, pp. 230-32.

[3] Paul Jorgenson, Shakespeare's Military World, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1956, pp. 1-34.

With his soldier-of-fortune attitude, Parolles points up the tenuous hold of the virtues of an older generation over a younger. Because he is convinced that his own pretensions are important, he has no respect for a life of virtuous family responsibility. He is probably low-born, but more importantly, beside a fatherless heroine and a fatherless young nobleman, he is truly the fatherless one.

His uncertain status in the Rousillon household seems a reflection of the self he is acting yet not truly living.

Parolles' life is a pose and a bluff. He does not use a disguise or mask in the way which permits Shakespeare's comic heroines so much psychic space and freedom. He assumes a pose of martial valor his sex tells him he must truly "live" to imitate. A woman disguised as a man in Shakespeare's comedies brings answers to the problem of keeping track of a straying lover or finding a way to woo him, but assuming a pose of martial valour when these inner qualities are absent is a disaster. None of Shakespeare's females in disguise pretends to valour; Viola's consternation at being challenged to a duel in Twelfth Night points up the gentleness and harmlessness of Shakespeare's comic heroines who discover so much sheer fun in covering their tracks for a while.

Male impostors who attempt the outwardly martial character always meet with disaster, and Parolles is no exception. His cowardly opportunism is the opposite of Helena's quiet and accommodating wisdom, which reminds us of Matthew 11:16: "Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore as wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." Helena has to work through the blocks which Parolles' bad counsel to Bertram set in her way: like other females in disguise, she must find a way to get back to her husband, who has run away to the wars, and also find a way to consummate her marriage which her husband refuses. Her disguise changes her female identity; she does not put on a male costume but acts according to the advice of the Gospel to live a paradoxical life of dove-like innocence and serpent-like wisdom. Helena has to take advantage of the corruption of Bertram's sexual will to accomplish the seemingly impossible tasks he sets her. The impossible conditions Bertram imposes, that Helena get his ancestral ring and become pregnant with his child before he will accept her as his wife, are easily gotten around with the "bed-trick," the switch of Helena for Diana. Helena exploits Bertram's sexual desires, but she redeems them by making them an integral part of his married life. The external blocks to the consummation of her marriage are not nearly as difficult as the psychological blocks: convincing Bertram to love her is a "block" not resolved until the end of the play, and Bertram's last-minute change of heart, on condition that Helena explain to him how she brought him an heir, is to some critics an unconvincing reformation of the heart and a chief problem in interpreting this play.

If Bertram's pride of family and scorn of Helena prove a difficult obstacle to Shakespeare's traditional happy ending, Helena's determination to deserve Bertram's love is also a thorn in the side of an interpretation which says that Helena deserves and completes the happiness of the play. The audience remembers that in The Merchant of Venice the Prince of Aragon is greeted with the picture of a blinking idiot when he chooses the silver casket because he thinks he deserves love. The usual comic formula of young people wanting to get married and having to find some way around parental opposition is reversed in this play, where the older characters all approve and further the marriage. Parolles seems to be a relatively young man, yet he fulfills the role of a senex blocker to married happiness, for his own badly formed and callow reasons. The play runs the danger of becoming a forced choice in both love and marriage, which according to Frye breaks the first law of comedy:

> What normally happens is that a young man wants a young woman, that this desire is resisted by some opposition, usually paternal, and that near the end of the play some twist in the plot enables the hero to have his will.[4]

Yet Helena overcomes the technical difficulties of Bertram's challenge, and with the promise of a child he has fathered, he changes his mind and accepts the marriage. The perpetuation of the family name, which the pregnant Helena represents, finally wins his approval, and perhaps successfully alleviates the atmosphere of loss and grieving which opens the play. Helena's accomplishments are just that: accomplishing an heir, which fits with the pride of family and place which so strongly motivates Bertram. As a campaigner for Bertram's acquiescence to marry her, Helena does not have much to offer, but as a wife and mother she can reinforce the aristocratic emphasis on perpetuating the family name and the family honor. In Bertram's eyes, Helena proves herself worthy of the Rousillon name, promising to perpetuate it with her pregnancy. She proves the paradox of becoming and being at the same time, which is part of the paradox of Matthew 11:16.

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[4] Anatomy of Criticism, p. 163.

Becoming part of an aristocratic family is not dangerous social climbing in Helena's case, as it would be for Malvolio, because she has the approbation of virtually every other aristocratic character in the play (a reversal of the comic formula), but necessary in this play if Helena is to avoid the charge of crass and dangerous ambition. But Shakespeare could not solve the problem of making Helena's key virtues, beauty and humility, worthy of Bertram's love unless he first made her acceptable to Bertram's elders. In the debate between nature and nurture, Helena's nature gives her the aristocratic qualities of honesty and virtue, and her nurture gives her power to heal the sick, a virtue which belongs later to the noble Cerimon in Pericles.

Helena resembles Portia in her desire to be worthy of her husband, yet unlike Portia she must do the wooing because she has no vast treasures to attract suitors. Her gift of healing, given freely to the king in exchange for the possibility of a husband of her own choosing, is the same kind of fabulous adventuring for something of great value we see in Bassanio's quest for a wife. The King of France has the folkloric outlines of a king who represents the riches of the kingdom; yet he is not as much a representative of the fertility of the kingdom as of the virtuous and wise government of that kingdom. When he places his faith in Helena, that faith brings her the prize she seeks. As G. Wilson Knight says, "her feminine humility becomes an active and challenging, almost a male force."[5] Like Prospero, she can save lives, but, at least initially, she is powerless to change hearts, and has to depend on a force larger and more mysterious than her own cleverness to accomplish that. The remarkable transition in character from The Merchant of Venice to All's Well That Ends Well shows us Shakespeare's ability to make Helena the suitor and the adventurer in love without making her the aggressor, and also his ability to keep her dove-like in the accomplishment of her design. With Helena we find ourselves endowed with the conviction that she is bringing about things the way they really should be, not just the way she wants them to be.

The accomplishment becomes more miraculously paradoxical when we realize Bertram has things to be said on his side too: he is young, and he has no desire to get married and be confined to a wife at home. He wants the adventure the wars in Italy offer the young nobleman, and he does not see through the false image of Parolles as does everyone else. His mother and his king are blocks to his ambition towards martial virtue, an ambition which is quite understandable in a young nobleman. In Much Ado the same ambition was laudable in Benedick, who may have deserted Beatrice to pursue martial adventure--she hints at such an occurrence:

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[5] The Sovereign Flower, London: Methuen, 1958, p. 131.

> PEDRO Come, lady, come; you have lost the heart of Signior Benedick.
>
> BEATRICE Indeed, my lord, he lent it me awhile, and I gave him use for it--a double heart for his single one. Mary, once before he won it of me with false dice; therefore your grace may well say I have lost it.
>
> (Much Ado About Nothing, II.i.248-52)

However, the mourning atmosphere of All's Well and its nostalgia for bygone virtues force Bertram to act the part of a responsible adult before he is ready, which makes his flight to Italy psychologically understandable, if not reasonable. Because his mother and the old noblemen Lefew and the rich and dying King of France are all so nostalgic for bygone days of virtue, they put pressure on Bertram to conform to their wishes. They see and value in Helena what Bertram does not see and does not value because he is young. The older characters appreciate the innocence and virtue and physical beauty of Helena, but again quite understandably, Bertram does not; he sees the poor physician's daughter he has grown up with, and he does not wish to marry a girl he has been familiar with from childhood or a poor physician's daughter who grew up in the same house. It is not the refusal of Bertram that we object to, because Bertram is forced to accept Helena's choice. He does not dare cross the king's will when the king's life has been saved by the physician's daughter, and the king himself represents the wishes of the entire body politic. Bertram, however, has no desire to marry so shining a heroine; instead, he wishes to win renown for himself. Helena does not even offer Bertram the change from martial interests to romantic interests that characterizes the peacetime Claudio, whose war is over and whose interest has turned to softer thoughts. A mother's choice does not necessarily mean a son's choice, although a consensus of approval for Helena, including all the other young noblemen the king has provided for Helena to choose among is a powerful incentive to Bertram to feel the same way about her. Unfortunately, Bertram does not have the same feelings about her, and he seems a particularly ungrateful man to the rest of France by being in emotional disagreement with so many others. It is as if Helena's maternal role were more important than her feminine role, and she knows it. In Bertram's eyes, Helena only assumes value when she is an adjunct to the noble household she wishes desperately to be part of in marriage. Of course, she is much more than that in the play, but perhaps not for Bertram. On stage, Bertram sees her as his wife once only, (Act II, scene iii), and does not see her in the flesh again until after he returns to his ancestral seat at Rousillon.

If the comic heroine of the Middle Comedies assumes male disguise and turns her footsteps to the shrine of St. Jacques, Bertram undergoes a similar initiation process.[6] He is initiated into the rites of manhood by testing his courage on the battlefield in a foreign land, the equivalent of the "green world" of the comic heroines. He returns to Rousillon with a scar on one cheek and a reputation for valour, and then he tries to lie his way out of every responsibility he owes to Diana, the woman he thinks he has seduced. Bertram scarcely emerges from his liminality before he has to assume his duties as husband, Count of Rousillon, and father.

Helena can be more her dove-like self with the older, virtuous members of the kingdom--the Countess of Rousillon, Count Lefew, and the King of France. She allows herself to be adopted by the Countess as a daughter after her secret love for Bertram is out, and Lefew is on both her side and Bertram's. With the King of France she must be both dove-like and serpent-like, putting her life in jeopardy to be given the chance to heal the king, a move which is more like the serpent than the dove. After she is allowed her great chance together with the risk she takes, she returns to the dove-like behavior she needs to win over her powerful benefactor.

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[6] Marjorie Garber discusses other Shakespearean comedy characters specifically, but her general thesis about liminality and the rites of passage applies to Bertram too. Marjorie Garber, Coming of Age in Shakespeare, London; Methuen, 1981, *passim*.

But Helena knows the loyalty of the Countess of Rousillon will not be enough to win over Bertram. She must insinuate herself with the hope for life for the king, and prove as deserving and spotless as a dove when she wins him to her side. The paradox of having all knowledge of corruption seems to mesh especially well with the idea of the King of France as a representative of the health of the kingdom. Old age and sterility are the enemies of the kingdom, represented in the form of incurable sickness in the king, and Helena restores the health of France when she restores the vitality of its moral order in the person of the king. The healed king re-establishes the moral authority and vigor which so obviously belong to him, and forces Bertram to marry the savior of the kingdom for his own and the kingdom's good.

Blocking the senex wishes of the king (unorthodox as they are) amounts to the same thing as blocking the wishes of the entire kingdom, so the unbearable moral suasion which Bertram is confronted with he must, if he is in his right mind, agree to.

The senex wishes of the Countess of Rousillon can be gotten around, but the senex wishes of the king have to be complied with, partly because Helena in her healing skill becomes more than she presents outwardly (a virtuous maiden), and partly because the King is the highest authority and greatest nobility in the land. Helena's ability to be serpent and dove are just the balance of aggressiveness and passiveness (if we can use such crude psychological terms) she needs to make herself known to the king and get the chance to make use of her healing powers. Helena herself, if we extend the term of _senex_ influence, seems destined to heal the king according to her father's wishes, needing only a patient for the completion of the test her father has set her by giving her the prescription to be used on a patient who is incurably sick.

This is the only comedy in which the heroine purposely sides with all _senex_ wishes against the emotional inclinations of the young romantic lead with whom she is in love. This leads to the classification of _All's Well_ as a Problem Play. In this comedy, the way Shakespeare has designed it, the _senex_ wishes are both the right wishes and the fair wishes. It is better for Bertram to marry a girl who loves him and has been of great service to the kingdom, than it is for Bertram to adopt the shallow-rooted attitude toward women Parolles represents. That does not make the reversal of the comic formula less of a "problem," but it does establish a comic matrix which Bertram has to be talked into for his own good. Parolles is his only ally in Bertram's desire to do as he wishes with women, and Parolles is completely exposed by the Dumain brothers. What Bertram has cruelly boasted cannot be accomplished has been accomplished by the last scene of the play, so Bertram becomes a liar in multiple ways, lying about what has become the truth: he has consummated his marriage, his wife has managed to get his ancestral ring, and she is with child by him. Bertram can only be defeated, as Helena knows in her serpent-wisdom, by a refutation composed of the most palpable and obvious evidence. In this case (as Hamlet would say), palpable and irrefutable facts must confront verbal lies. Bertram's evasions sound as hollow as Parolles' slanders did in his exposure scene.

Family traditions and obligations nearly submerge the comic formula in All's Well That Ends Well, but absence of family distinguishes the character relationships in Measure for Measure. The brother-sister tie is the only familial tie in the play. The play is clearly divided into two groups of characters, those who represent the population of the stews and those who take a moral stance for or against some aspect of sexual behavior. The stews are populated mostly with poor victims (who do not appear on stage) used up in the trade. The main characters get off more lightly than the prostitutes; what with disease and poverty, there is a certain fatality to what the brothel characters do. "The malicious busybody" Lucio, as Bullough calls him, is the most obvious example of the customer who distinguishes between good and bad women and tries to remove himself from an association with the trade he knows well.

All's Well has the Rousillon family tradition and, more importantly, the older generation represented in the Countess, Lefew, and the King of France to guide it, but a noble older generation does not exist in Measure for Measure, except perhaps for Duke Vincentio, who retreats from the play to see what his subordinates will do and perhaps the other friars as well. The sexual anonymity of the suburbs, anonymous for the purposes of avoiding the attention of the law, takes form and name in Shakespeare's play in the amiable drift of the conversation between Pompey the bawd and the humane magistrate Escalus. Shakespeare may have meant to give a picture of the subculture of London's taverns and brothels but instead of that he gives us a clown to introduce the brothel population to the stage. And Elbow resembles Dogberry in the "fortunate" paradoxes he speaks:

> ELBOW If it please your honor, I am the poor
> Duke's constable, and my name is Elbow.
> I do lean upon justice, sir, and do bring
> in here before your good honor two
> notorious benefactors.
> ANGELO Benefactors? Well, what benefactors are
> they? Are they not malefactors?
> ELBOW If it please your honor, I know not well
> what they are; but precise villains they
> are; that I am sure of, and void of all
> profanation in the world that good
> Christians ought to have.
> ESCALUS This comes off well; here's a wise officer.
> (II.i.45-56)

His language-mangling, along with Froth's befuddled drift in the conversation, plus a simple question from Pompey ("Does your worship mean to geld and splay all the youth of the city?") which states the impossibility of suppressing illicit sexual activity, causes the entire legal action to fade into plays on words. No whipping of either defendant takes place, as the deputy Angelo suggests before he leaves the judgement to Escalus. Mistress Overdone eventually ends her sexual career in the tub and Pompey finds new employment in prison, but Shakespeare's handling of the problem of sexual morality in the city is to deal with it through comic and basically non-interventionist means. The play deals with lust, but not naturally with prostitution, which gives a background of sexual license that puts the moral stances of three morally opposed characters, Angelo, Isabella and Claudio, in sharper focus.

The theme of Measure for Measure comes from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, "Judge not, that ye be not judged," but Lucio does not class himself among the Publicans and sinners because he thinks he is just the opposite of Pharisaical. He thanks God for the "double standard" which allows him to be as other men are but does not take the bad women in the trade (as opposed to good women) seriously until one of them, Kate Keepdown, is made his wife by court decree. There may be two different types of women, but he feels he publicly associates only with the "good" type. By the punishment the Duke hands to Lucio, Vincentio tells him he is no better than the women he frequents:

> [To Lucio]
> You, sirrah, that knew me for a fool, a coward,
> One all of luxury, an ass, a madman,
> Wherein have I so deserved of you,

That you extol me thus?
LUCIO 'Faith, my lord, I spoke it but according to the
trick. If you will hang me for it, you may; but
I had rather it would please you, I might be
whipped.
DUKE Whipped first, sir, and hanged after.
Proclaim it, provost, round about the city,
As I have heard him swear himself there's one
Whom he begot with child--let her appear,
And he shall marry her. The nuptial finished,
Let him be whipped and hanged.
LUCIO I beseech your highness, do not marry me to a
whore. You said even now, I made you a duke;
good, my lord, do not recompense me in making
me a cuckold.
DUKE Upon thine honor, thou shalt marry her.
Thy slanders I forgive, and therewithal
Remit thy other forfeits. Take him to prison,
And see our pleasure herein executed.
(V.i. 496-516)

In a comic reconciliation which is standard in Shakespeare, Lucio is made a part of the comic community. He is the character who thinks of himself as a gentleman about town, and he becomes a part of the comic matrix, whether he wants to or not, simply by the fact that he must be married to the woman he impregnated. In an implicit way he suffers from the same sin and forgiveness as Claudio and Juliet. In fact, he suffers more forgiveness, because Claudio and Juliet already have a written contract to their marriage, attendant upon Juliet's dowry. Mariana's loss of a dowry is the excuse Angelo has to get out of his contracted marriage. The only part of the play that truly rankles, though, in the way of "forgiveness," is the apology of Juliet to Vincentio for her pregnancy by Claudio. Claudio and Juliet suffer humiliation for a far more "honorable" marriage than the broken contract of Angelo, or Lucio's abandonment of his natural wife.

Lucio and Angelo are more alike than they seem. Both are willing to slander others, and thus more reprehensible in their personal hypocrisy than the rest of the characters in the play. Understandably, they are subject to the strictest forms of comic justice. The remarkable part of the play is the abstracting quality of the justice which it dispenses so uniformly to the innocent and guilty alike. As Harriet Hawkins points out so intelligently, the interlocking and conflicting claims of Angelo, Isabella, and Claudio do not allow the audience to take anyone's side completely.[7] The play never really deals with the "life" of sexual license, except gently and indirectly in the clown scenes with Pompey and Elbow. Shakespeare seems in possession of full sociological knowledge concerning prostitution, and does not have the heart to condemn it with any fundamental moral judgements.

Shakespeare never comes any closer to describing sexual vice than he does among Falstaff's "family" in the Boar's Head Tavern, far closer than in Measure for Measure. The same brothel background found in Measure for Measure is repeated in Pericles, yet in that play Marina is a one-woman reform squad who converts her future husband Lysimachus from his brothel-frequenting ways. In Pericles Shakespeare renders the brothels inoperative when faced with the magical virtue of Marina. Shakespeare uses brothels as background and as threats to feminine virtue. Measure for Measure is what can be called the beginning of a study devoted to the theme of sexual vice, but Shakespeare never carries through with what he intends. Sexual vice as such is never the major moral problem of any of his comedies: only King Lear brings down an indictment of sexual lust harsher than anything Shakespeare intends in his comedies, and there Shakespeare indicts the lustful nature of all humanity.

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[7] Likenesses of Truth in Renaissance and Restoration Drama, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972, pp.51-78.

The three major characters of the debate about sexual virtue in Measure for Measure, Angelo, Isabella, and Claudio, make interlocking and deadlocked demands, and the mutually exclusive nature of their versions of justice requires the intervention of Vincentio in Act V. Isabella stands for chaste devotion to a cloistered life; her purity is notable for its sexual virtue in a city where the stews flourish. "Enskyed and sainted," Lucio calls her, but Angelo's lust puts her character to the test by setting this ascetic love, which would take the stripes of flagellation as jewels, against the unjust offer of Claudio's life for Isabella's virginity.

Angelo stands for lust with the power of legalism behind it. He is the quintessential client, as far as the brothel trade is concerned, because he knows what he wants and he has the power to enforce his wishes. Following

Whetstone's Promus and Cassandra, Shakespeare casts Isabella (to her horror) in the role of the prostitute and Angelo in the mold of the customer. The sordid background of sexual vice which Shakespeare writes about with such a light and humane touch when he gives us actual characters in the trade resurfaces in the deadlock of the main characters. In them we see genuine sexual vice. Claudio is healthier in his desire than Angelo and less rigid in his defense of sexual virtue than his sister Isabella. Isabella's self-regarding virtue is the exception which proves the rule of sexual vice in Vienna. Claudio's love for Juliet, however, is the only natural expression of desire among the three moral antagonists. Yet his moral stance is compromised, because his desire to live (natural as it is) would pander Isabella to Angelo. Isabella may have a real wish to live life closer to God than marriage provides (Matthew 10:37 describes the single life devoted to God as "thrice blessed" and marriage as an alleviation of "burning") but her virtue would abandon Claudio to die.[8]

Angelo's sudden lustful intent towards Isabella horrifies him, but he turns the law to his own purposes, satisfies himself that he has seduced Isabella, betrays his promise to her by ordering Claudio killed, and anxiously awaits the "ocular proof" of Claudio's severed head. Angelo becomes a tyrant because he insists on prosecuting an unrealistic but unspecified law which apparently prohibits procreation out of wedlock, and then condemns another man for the same crime he himself wants to commit. The only dramatic resolution to his legalistic sexual tyranny is a free expression of love itself, which makes it not surprising that in this play the "bed-trick" is used again. The folkloric meaning of Helena's instant pregnancy after one night with Bertram is not the intent of this particular consummation of a reluctant betrothal. Rather, Shakespeare wants to consummate and make a physical fact of Angelo's equally binding marriage contract with Mariana, a betrothal which was broken off because Mariana's dowry perished in a shipwreck along with her brother.

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[8] Hawkins, pp. 51-78.

However, Angelo's sexual satisfaction does not make him a more self-aware and merciful judge, as the passage in Matthew from the New Testament says he should be, but instead makes him more of a tyrant and hypocrite determined to shut up any knowledge of his crime. Isabella's public denunciation brings some repentance on Angelo's part, but he only asks that the law be used against him too, which may be a "fair" punishment for what he thinks he has done to Claudio, yet does not take into account the forgiveness open to him also. Vincentio's stage-managing saves Angelo from dishonoring his own precipitous emotions, but Angelo's self-judgement after he is exposed falls on the other side of the argument; he assumes he is the same as other men condemned under the law--beyond forgiveness according to the law. Lucio, on the other hand, thinks there is nothing to forgive in sexual sinning because the blame lies with the whores and not with the customers.

But that is rhetoric from one special segment of Vienna's subculture--the customers. It is the settled opinion of all those who participate in the brothel trade that punishing fornication is the equivalent of punishing breathing. Yet, assuming that all men are alike in their lust is to make a judgement from the other side of the argument about sexual virtue, and a form of "judging" nonetheless. The passage in Matthew about the "mote" in one's eye asks that we be quick to judge ourselves and be aware of our own sins and slow to judge others. Angelo has the beginnings of this insight, before he becomes a judge, when he tells Vincentio, "Let there some more test be made of my mettle/ Before so noble and so great a figure be stamped on it" (I.ii.48-9).

The Duke becomes an outrageous impostor of a priest with Claudio, cynically preparing him for a death he would not have the heart to impose himself, a death for which, as a false friar, he should not be confessing, but he brings out for Claudio's terrified perusal the standard stoic and Christian arguments of why it is sweet to die.[9] Vincentio becomes a retreating eiron figure, an architectus of the plot and its comic resolution, as Frye points out,[10] but this play lacks the "middle" which we find in all the rest of Shakespeare's comedies, that is, a life of middle-class or noble romance, where sexual desire is normal and love and procreation are a blessing. If this play uses the comic formula of courtship and marriage (which is the missing formula in All's Well: Bertram recognizes no marriage with his wife until after she is pregnant by him), then Shakespeare seems to be saying that the life force women represent is even more powerful than the love which brings comic hero and heroine together in marriage.

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[9] Clifford Leech, "Authority, Meaning, and Justice in _Measure for Measure_," _Renaissance English Studies_, October, 1941, pp. 385-99.

If an abnormally tawdry kind of sexuality is the norm in Measure for Measure, then the city of Vienna seems scarcely virtuous enough to support any marriage; the brothels predominate on one side, and cold chastity on the other. Although several marriages come out of this play, it is scarcely a standard romance. Claudio has to plead for his life; Juliet has to repent for a sexuality which is far more normal than life in the brothels; and the marriages between Angelo and Mariana and Lucio and Kate Keepdown are forced marriages. When he is tested, Angelo changes from a virtuous man into a man who hides behind an impossible standard of perfect sexual abstinence in an unvirtuous world. He is also guilty of extortion, subverting justice, and several counts of perjury by the time his judicial tenure is over, serious crimes for a man whose blood is allegedly "snow broth." Mariana's love comes close to an ideal of charity in its patience and hope, and it finally redeems Angelo at the very moment he thinks he is beyond forgiveness.

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[10] Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 174.

The "bed-trick" may be objected to because it is a hurried and purely physical union with an unknown partner when it should be a complicated physical, emotional, and spiritual experience, but it seems in this play, as well as in All's Well, a way of redeeming men who reach an impasse concerning the virtue they present to the world and their own sexual desires. Quite literally both Bertram and Angelo find their sexual desires and their sexual transgressions redeemed in marriage. Their lust has beeen transformed to a consummation of marriage, and their waywardness only serves to strengthen a way of living which has the approval of the church. Everything which is unchaste before marriage becomes chaste in marriage. This lesson is taught by Helena and by Mariana, who fulfills the higher law of charity simply by continuing to love Angelo and want him for her husband, despite what he has done to her and to her good name.

The marriages that comedy normally brings about do in these plays seem wrenched out of a context inimical to romantic comedy, which contributes to the "problem" of Measure for Measure. It is, to some extent, a standard comedy, but it finds its resolution in an atmosphere hostile to comedy. Lucio's marriage to a whore points back to the context from which the comic plot forcibly brings about its multiple marriages. Mariana is a virtuous maiden, but even after her "bed-trick" is revealed to him, Angelo never shows any more gratitude for his redemption than Bertram does. In these two problem comedies, the portrait of heroic feminine intervention comes through clearly, but the men they save, principally Bertram and Angelo, seem hardly worth it. The character blocks are in these two plays part of the virtues and vices of human nature, and comic antagonists seem to be replaced with a more generalized and floating kind of comic antagonism to the aims of comedy itself.

VI. The Hero Beleaguered: Romance Structure in Pericles and Cymbeline

In the Romances the concept of the comic antagonist changes from that of nearly excluded and often ostracised comic antagonist to that of pitied and suffering "self-blocking" antagonist, for several reasons. The Romances include no comic victims in the tradition of Shylock or Malvolio or Parolles. The Romances do not display comic antagonists whose pretensions become particularly sensitive issues in their comic worlds and lead to exposure or expulsion. Plot complications in the Romances depend less on a resolution of obstacles presented by the comic antagonists, as in the rest of Shakespeare's comedies, than on a resolution of a personal failure, their loss of faith in their wives.

The male protagonists, beginning with Pericles and ending with Prospero, have to find forgiveness for their actual or spiritual transgressions against the women they love. The specific Christian themes of "transgression, expiation, and redemption" seem to define the final form of these plays, and make the effects they aim for "philosophic and semi-religious."[1]

If in the Romances the presence of specifically comic antagonists gives way to anti-comedic forces more aligned with the tragic and closer to being defined as forces of evil, then it follows that the heroines would become more aligned with forces which are specifically good, and would possess feminine virtues which have redemptive and, in The Winter's Tale, perhaps resurrecting qualities. In All's Well age can redeem youth, or place it in a position to be redeemed. In the Romances youth can and does redeem age, and sometimes even sacrifices itself for the transgressions of other generations. The lands of banishment for the most part remain places of exile, gladly given up for a return with or to a re-united family. Pericles is the only exception, where at the end the audience is told that the protagonists will return to the vacant kingdoms and rule in peace. Even the enchanted isle in The Tempest ceases to be useful: the island kingdom contains in seed form all the possible manifestations of ambitious evil and harmless innocence, but Prospero and his newly-betrothed daughter return to the larger world.

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[1] Alfred Harbage, ed., The Complete Pelican Shakespeare, New York: The Viking Press, 1975, p. 1257.

The steadfastness of the heroines is severely tested in the Romances, and the comic heroines are often less than heroic. Somewhat paradoxically, the Romance world the protagonists of both sexes inhabit is hostile to the romantic hopes of young lovers and to the married happiness these youthful lovers represent. The Romance protagonists, as Frye says, must actively combat evil, and, with some modifications, do so in the same spirit of adventure with which protagonists in epic romances combat them. This is especially true in Pericles and Cymbeline, where Pericles and Posthumus Leonatus must wander great distances and battle armed enemies before they are restored to happiness with those they love.

In the Romances, the "green world" or world of idealized and expressed desire changes drastically. The places of banishment are not as desirable as the homes and home countries the Romance protagonists are banished from: their banishments are never fortunate.

If the clowns in Much Ado and Measure for Measure redeem malefactors through language, then the principle of forgiveness holds true throughout Shakespearean comedy and becomes a recurrent principle of forgiveness in language. The clown-gravediggers in Hamlet reflect the same principle of forgiveness in tragedy by partly redeeming the tragic Hamlet with the remembered procreative forces of a comic world stored in memory. The same principle of redeeming forgiveness appears in the Romances, or to use another critical classification, in the "tragicomedies" although for this chapter "romance" is the more accurate term. Redeeming forgiveness is found in both comedy and tragedy, and redeems by means of characters who come close to representing the paradox of "tragic" innocence. The Romances might be redefined, correspondingly, as "innocent" tragedy, a genre including both tragedy and comedy. The Romance heroines become more and more powerful manifestations of innocence.

Miranda's undisillusioned compassion is as important to the ending of the Tempest as Hermione's resurrection is to the ending of The Winter's Tale.

Pericles begins the tradition of essentially virtuous male protagonists buffeted by the changeable winds of Fortune. Like the other male protagonists, Pericles does not so much defeat tragic forces by tragic action as he becomes an unwilling victim of self-destroying evil and a spectator-victim of injustice. The play he inhabits becomes an exposition of forces which are closer to injustice than to irrevocable tragic action. There are three great injustices in Pericles: sexual injustice, in the incestuous relationship between Antiochus and his daughter; economic injustice, in the starvation of Tharsus; and social injustice, in the sexual slavery of women in the brothel trade in Mytilene. All three injustices are different forms of "poverty." The link between the spiritual poverty of Antiochus and his daughter and the physical poverty of the famine in Tharsus is especially strong. The second form of poverty (famine) is a reflection of the paradoxical "plenty/poverty" of the first, the whited sepulchre of the incestuous relationship. The blatant social injustice of sexual slavery in Mytilene seems to occupy a middle ground between the hidden and the obvious forms of poverty of the other two injustices. If not for her magical virginity, Marina would be exploited both as a sexual object and as a way to gain a living for others.

The only comic scenes in the play are those which reflect the frustrations of the Mytilene brothel-keepers when confronted with the obstacle of Marina's magical virginity. The reason this Romance forestalls the destruction of innocence, is, I think, that Marina embodies all the active virtues needed to defeat the injustices *Pericles* exposes. She shows the energy and independence to pay off the brothel keepers and still keep herself in a deeply civilized way.

Marina is the central character in a dramatic parable, which, like New Testament parables, preaches the active cultivation of virtuous personal independence leading to independence of the spirit. As Charlton says of comic heroines in general, it is not what Marina does for others that makes the difference, but what she does for others by doing for herself. Marina teaches by example, as the Gospels do, in a direct line of inheritance from the active interventionist charity of her father in Tharsus, who brings grain to its starving inhabitants. The fact that Marina embodies the same values as her father and the same virtues as her mother helps to make the play's "cognitio" effective. The relationship between Antiochus and his daughter is sealed in hypocrisy, but the family ties between Marina and her father are open and obvious from the nobility of the lives they lead. Marina is her father's daughter in every action she takes.

The episodic plot of *Pericles* is held together by the narrative and choric voice of John Gower, and this chorus becomes the narrative bridge from one episode to the next. Other choruses in Shakespeare, the *Henry V* chorus, for example, are both a narrative thread of dramatic events and an imaginative intensifier of the events of war which take place metonymically on stage. Like Cymbeline, Pericles is more acted upon by events than he is a protagonist who acts independently of them.

The first blocking character he encounters is a *senex iratus* who has usurped his daughter's rights to marriage, incest being one motive for not wishing to marry off this daughter. Antiochus is also a *senex* who cannot be outwitted, as in a usual comedy plot, because he offers his daughter's marriageability to the outside world as a riddle which has a death penalty attached for solving it. A suitor who can solve the riddle must keep the answer to himself to save his life, and consequently his hopes for marriage are crushed. Pericles manages to solve the riddle without naming the sin, then must go on the run from Antiochus' revenge after he and the king have made themselves understood to each other. Like Egypt's pharaoh who hunts Moses in the Old Testament story, or the child Jesus pursued by Herod, Pericles must hide himself for his own protection from the far-reaching secular wrath of Antiochus. Antiochus is finally slain by a thunderbolt of divine wrath, though only after Pericles has fled his kingdom, and the manner of his death implies that Pericles' guessing of the riddle has helped to bring about Antiochus's downfall.

When Pericles sails for Tharsus, where famine stalks the land, we are reminded by the events there of Joseph and Pharaoh's dream: unlike the Egyptians, however, the people of Tharsus have not saved the surplus from the good years (which corresponds with the seven fat kine and seven lean kine), when luxury was the fashion, and are now starving for the surplus they used to throw away. The famine in Tharsus is an approximate parallel to the whited sepulchre of outward wealth and beauty in Antiochus' relationship with his daughter. Pericles' charitable action in Tharsus is just the opposite of the "poverty" of the emotional reality he has fled--he brings ships filled with grain to harbour at Tharsus with no false show of peace covering hidden treachery.

Pericles is again forced to flee Tharsus when Thaliard the hired assassin comes to murder him, but then fate deals Pericles a winning hand. He ends up in Pentapolis, and there gets another try at wooing a maiden, this time a virtuous and unvictimized daughter. Like Antiochus, King Simonides also plays the *senex*, but he and his daughter Thaisa are really in agreement about a future husband and son-in-law. Like Helena in *All's Well*, Thaisa becomes pregnant the night her marriage is consummated. King Simonides removes all blocks to the folkloric fertility of this marriage; he puts off all the other suitors with a year's delay (as in Love's Labour's Lost), and then makes sure that his daughter is married and made pregnant by Pericles in the intervening time. He creates an indisputable marriage between his daughter and Pericles, as indisputable as the marriage with Antiochus' daughter was impossible.

Pericles' heraldic emblem, which he presents at the tournament, stands for his misfortunes. The device is a withered bough "that's only green at top," which accurately symbolizes Pericles' blasted hopes in love and also his hope for the future in the renewing cycle of the seasons. The device could also represent the structure of Shakespeare's Romances at this early stage of their development; Pericles loses all hope with Antiochus but hope is restored at the end (or "top") of the play, during the "cognitio" when all illusions of grief and loss are destroyed by the reunion of the characters who were scattered by natural misfortunes.

When Pericles sails with Thaisa for Tyre, he is forced to put his apparently dead wife overboard after childbirth; when she is washed ashore and her coffin is brought to Cerimon, themes of physical healing and spiritual wealth appear in the play. Music and spiritual health, themes which are broken up and scattered earlier in the play, reappear and unite with the themes Cerimon represents, in the resurrection of Thaisa. Like Pericles, Cerimon is renowned for his charity; the physician repeats the theme of charity and spiritual wealth we saw earlier with Pericles when he came to the aid of the starving inhabitants of Tharsus. The allied themes of generosity and love represented by Portia in The Merchant of Venice reappear in the folkloric doctor figure of Cerimon, whose life has some parallels with St. Paul's.

> Your honor has through Ephesus poured forth
> Your charity, and hundreds call themselves
> Your creatures, who by you have been restored;
> And not your knowledge, your personal pain, but even
> Your purse, still open, hath built Lord Cerimon
> Such strong renown as time shall never rage.
> (III.ii.42-7)

Like St. Paul, who lived and preached in the wealthy city of Ephesus, Cerimon enjoys fame for his healing, fame which has gone everywhere, just as the fame of Paul's preaching and healing travelled with the commerce that moved from port to port more quickly than St. Paul did. Pericles' despair for his wife when she is put overboard, "A terrible childbed hast thou had, my dear; /No light, no fire" (III.i.56-7), is alleviated for the audience by the music and warmth surrounding Thaisa's caulked casket, and there the noble physician resuscitates her.

Pericles leaves his daughter with Cleon, whose wife Dionyza becomes jealous of Marina's accomplishments because they put her own daughter in the shade, and she attempts to murder Marina. Eventually Marina is sold to a brothel in

Mytilene by the pirates who capture her. In Mytilene we move back into the brothel-world of Measure for Measure and into the gross sexual reality made explicit by the talk and threats of Pandar, Bolt, and Bawd. Marina's magical virginity saves her from the "fate worse than death," but it is her enabling talents and skills in the visual arts which win for her her independence from the brothel world. Marina's skills are the skills of civilization; by her industry she surrounds herself with pleasant and useful works of graphic art, which transform the gross sensual reality of the brothel she has escaped from to a better way of living for herself. In the process of making her living, Marina becomes an example for all the youth of Mytilene.

Gower's narrative and choric voice speeds up the time-frame of Marina's industry and talents, aligning them with the visual arts and more importantly with the mimetic creation of nature in art:

> . . .and with her neele composes
> Nature's own shape of bud, bird, branch or berry.
> (V.Chorus. 5-6)

Here perhaps, the reader receives an intimation in imagery of what is to come in dramatic characterization in the last Romances. That is, Marina can re-create the world around her in needlework and other art forms, an ability which looks forward to the resurrecting power of Paulina's and Hermione's alliance, where the past is restored by recreating it in the spectacular statue-scene of The

Winter's Tale. Marina's active talents are a hint of the alliance of artwork and stagecraft which takes place in Shakespeare's next-to-last Romance.

But what protects Marina is not simply her "magical" virtue, as Frye maintains. As in Othello's tortured memory of Desdemona's domestic accomplishments, Marina is known for her learning and her skill in fine arts:

> Marina thus the brothel scapes and chances
> Into an honest house, our story says,
> She sings like one immortal, and she dances
> As goddess-like to her admired lays;
> Deep clerks she dumbs. . .
> (V.Chorus.1-5)

During Christ's period of teaching in the temple, he amazed the scribes with his precocious learning; Marina does the same in Mytilene. The mantle of spiritual comforter and healer passes from Cerimon to Marina when she begins her independent life in Mytilene. Barber's wonderful article on Pericles and The Winter's Tale[2] tells us that Pericles must see the sacredness of the maternal before he can regain his wife Thaisa; in the first "cognitio" Pericles recognizes the mother in the daughter, and thus makes the eternal and nurturing link that leads to the reunification with his wife. Those links are eventually clear in all the Romances. The feminine and the maternal link the generations of families scattered by misfortune or madness.

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[2] C.L. Barber. "'Thou That Beget'st Him That Did Thee Beget': Transformation in Pericles and The Winter's Tale," Shakespeare Survey, Vol. 22, pp. 59-67.

In Pericles the anti-comedic forces (the continuing threat of Antiochus' secular power) are essentially defeated by Thaisa's pregnancy because Pericles is no longer a suitor and threat to Antiochus. The brunt of the play's destructive force shifts to Dionyza's jealousy towards Marina, and the natural catastrophes which beleaguer Pericles in his attempt to keep his family together. It is interesting to notice that after Hamlet, no character in Shakespeare has so many relentless enemies. But because they are enemies in a Romance, they are completely unsuccessful in the harm they wish to do Pericles or his family, whereas Hamlet's enemies destroy him.[3]

Pericles' despair is similar to the complete loss of identity Egeon faces under the death penalty in the alien town of Ephesus in The Comedy of Errors. Egeon should be a more affecting and pitiable character than Pericles, but the reader is aware of his plight only at the beginning and the end of the early comedy, while Pericles remains near the centre throughout the play. Partly because Pericles is often contending with forces of nature, which cause most of his catastrophes, and partly because the reader is insulated from Pericles' sorrow because he knows where Pericles' wife and daughter are all the time, we do not identify with his misfortunes completely. Pericles is essentially a hero beleaguered by palpable but remote forces, natural forces.

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[3] This Romance comes closest to John Fletcher's definition of tragi-comedy which he applied to a play of his own, The Faithful Shepherdess: "[it] wants deaths, which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet brings some near, which is enough to make it no comedy." See Alfred Harbage, ed. The Complete Pelican Shakespeare, New York: The Viking Press, 1975, p. 1257.

Shakespeare advances the isolation of the Romance protagonist one step further in Cymbeline; here a protagonist banished from family and nation copes with misfortune. Posthumus Leonatus is not subject to as many fierce misfortunes as Pericles, nor is he as unhinged with jealousy as Leontes, yet he is subject to both, and he is the only Romance protagonist who is tempted by, and then a participant in, active evil precipitated by a villain towards his wife.

The Italy Posthumus goes to in banishment lives up to its reputation among Elizabethan audiences for smooth deception, and remains an alien land of exile. Unlike Pericles, who finds a wife and a father-in-law after a shipwreck, which redeems his life from alienation, Posthumus finds no haven. Posthumus finally seeks war as a means to end his despair after he is sure his wife has been killed at his command, and as a means to return to Britain. Posthumus is truly a son of Britain. He draws his strength from the young nation where he was nurtured in the same royal household as his wife Imogen. Shakespeare adopts to the purposes of his story the archetypal pattern of the adopted child of lowly birth raised in a royal foster home, but he makes the vindication of Posthumus' worth a complicated matter, with a complicated Romance denouement. Bertrand Evans says that this is Shakespeare's greatest achievement in the exploitation of different levels of awareness and mistaken perception in all Shakespeare's comedies,[4] and the sprawling structure seems to be unified, as G. Wilson Knight points out, by patriotism towards the comic centrality of the emerging land and nationhood of Britain.[5]

Posthumus confronts a full slate of blocking characters in _Cymbeline_, and even becomes a comic antagonist himself. King Cymbeline is a _senex iratus_, furious with his daughter for marrying a man below her in station. Cymbeline blocks Posthumus' and Imogen's marriage in effect, by banishing Posthumus, and he carries _senex_ rage one step farther by trying to force his stepson Cloten on his daughter and by invalidating her marriage. He also blusteringly threatens Imogen: "You have done/ Not after our command. Away with her and pen her up" (I.i.151-2).

Cloten himself is a new kind of blocking character in the comedy canon, and the closeness in time between _Othello_ and _Cymbeline_ suggests that Roderigo and Cloten were Shakespeare's introduction of the "rejected suitor" to the comedies and Romances. The persistence of Cloten's suit for Imogen reminds the reader of the absurd, hopeless, sinister, and yet essentially comic pursuit of Desdemona by Roderigo. But where Roderigo is feckless, Cloten is an aggressive _miles gloriosus_ and a brute, and more ambitious in his lust for the woman he wants. His pursuit is bound up in his _nouveau_ fantasies of power, and his lust takes the form of chauvinist aggression when he promises himself he will rape Imogen in the presence of her husband's slain body while wearing that husband's old clothes.

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[4] Bertrand Evans, _Shakespeare's Comedies_, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1960, pp. 245-89.

[5] G. Wilson Knight, _The Crown of Life_, London: Methuen, 1958, pp. 129-203, _passim_.

Indeed, Imogen is beset with importuning suitors: for while Cloten resentfully serenades her outside her door, Iachimo, the smooth Italian deceiver, penetrates Imogen's bedchamber and uses what he sees against her. Many critics have noted the strange blend of the aesthetic and the voyeuristic in Iachimo's appreciation of the virtues of Imogen's beauty while asleep, and perhaps it is with relief that we eventually see Imogen follow Shakespeare's other comic heroines into male disguise.

Cymbeline's queen is both villain and blocker. She has Posthumus banished and is determined to arrange a good political marriage for her son. She plans to murder King Cymbeline after she has gotten her son married to Imogen, which makes her a female version of the worst kind of Machiavel. (Cymbeline is a consistently bad judge of character who defends his obtuseness at the end of the play with "It had been vicious to have mistrusted her.")

The dangerous wickedness of a king, Antiochus, is replaced in Cymbeline with a queen's, who hypocritically announces to the audience that she has Imogen's and Posthumus' best interests at heart, but secretly she does all she can to separate them for her son's political advancement. Cornelius and Pisanio, as wisely disloyal court-servants, ameliorate the effects of the Queen's malice by preventing it from having any lasting effect, thus bringing the dramatic action back from the brink of tragedy.

In Cymbeline, there are two step-parents, the queen at court and Belarius in a kind of "green world," a cave in the Welsh mountains above Milford Haven. Belarius is the bitterly betrayed step-father. Where the Queen is wicked, Belarius is wise, good at survival in the wilderness, and also a victim of Cymbeline's mania for banishing loyal and trustworthy servants. It takes Cloten's death at the hands of Guiderius to bring a measure of justice to Belarius and his twenty-year banishment, since Cloten seems to have all the advantages. Yet he is no match for step-siblings who have had the benefit of a healthy open air upbringing and have grown up without flattery, which has made Cloten unrealistic about his own abilities.

The blocking characters opposed to Posthumus' and Imogen's married happiness have obvious folklore origins, but the smooth Italian deceiver Iachimo seems a Renaissance invention. Iachimo, himself, however, has a change of heart after his army of Italian gentlemen is defeated by the hardier native Britons (or so the play implies--Iachimo seems to represent Italian corruption), which, as G. Wilson Knight notices so perceptively, points to the importance of patriotism and nationhood in the play. Many difficulties are resolved by the war Britain wins: Posthumus is reunited with his wife, his king, and, presumably, his country after the victory, and Belarius re-establishes a bond of loyalty with his liege-lord and returns Cymbeline's stolen sons to him. The patriotic marshalling of forces against an invasion has the same effect as the reconciliation of friend and enemy in Shakespeare's "green world" comedies: all characters are brought together at the end of the play in a "cognitio" and denouement.

Shakespeare, however, militates against patriotism as an answer to comedy's problems in two ways. First, he makes a case for patriotism and wickedness co-existing, since Cloten and his mother exhibit a fiery patriotism when Rome asks for tribute. Second, Posthumus' family brings on stage the terrible grief of war, not its glories, in the scene with Jupiter. The Jupiter scene shows a family trying to wrest some happiness on earth for its last surviving son, as if Posthumus' dead parents and brothers were petitioning a legislative body and not an omnipotent deity. If the war with Rome seems a moral clearing house for all the lies and hypocrisy which have split Cymbeline's family apart, patriotism seems to be subsumed into something more reconciling and comprehensive. "Sacrifice" is a word which seems closer to being the reconciling force in Cymbeline, and with it the hope for "one mind, and one mind good" (V.iv. 201-2) which comes out of the talks between the gaoler and the condemned Posthumus. Posthumus' talk with the gaoler signals the advent of the peaceable kingdom Christianity will begin to usher in during the reign of Caesar Augustus.

Cymbeline incorporates three different plot lines, and, more importantly, three distinct locations: Britain, Wales, and Italy. These factors make the play structurally a somewhat more sprawling and formless play than the other Romances. The adventures of Imogen and Posthumus have separate narrative threads, and most of the shifting adventures of Iachimo, Belarius, and Cloten form the third plotline as a narrative which provides opposition to both the other plots.

Imogen changes her beleaguered and homeless state for a "family" in Milford Haven, where her "adopted" family happens to be her real family. As Bertrand Evans says, neither the sister nor the brothers are aware of the blood tie, though the audience knows of it.[6] The tenderness of Guiderius and Arviragus makes an emotionally affecting scene, yet it is near Belarius' cave that Shakespeare reaches the height of the sublime and the ridiculous. The scene reaches a peak of lyrical sublimity when Imogen, in disguise and thought to be dead, is sung to rest with the lyrical elegy "Fear no more the heat o' the sun," and then becomes ridiculous later when she awakes and mourns the headless corpse she identifies, from the clothes, as her husband. When the Roman forces invade Milford Haven, she dares not even mention her husband's name, and is forced to hide her grief, which is in fact based on an illusion.

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[6] Evans, p. 272.

The elegy sung for Imogen becomes the lyrical height of this Romance. The song immediately impresses the reader as being independent of the themes and the context in which it is couched: it speaks of an almost sexual consummation in an early death, a sentiment both daring and beautiful, and an accurate emotional representation of death of the young, which is unfair to the young at the same time as it immortalizes them in their youth and beauty. The song seems Blakean, pointing up the intrinsic unfairness of life to the innocent and powerless. This elegy, and the visitation of Jupiter to Posthumus in Act V, become the clearest emotional high points in the play. That vision too, like the song, is beyond the range of the ordinary extraordinariness of the Romance plot. When Posthumus' family, dead of grief and wounds before Posthumus was born, argues with the chief of deities for the continuance of his happiness on earth, we finally see the unfairness of life, which would ordinarily go unprotested, addressed in specific grievances. What the elegy laments, unfairness or implicit unfairness for youth, gets an audience with the chief of deities and director of men's fortunes.

The victory of the Britons over the Romans seems to set free for expression the personal tragedies of war which kept the grief-stricken Sicilius and his family silent before. It is as if only the victory in war allows Posthumus' unfortunate family the right to argue with the gods (we are a long way from the Lear universe here) over a Romance protagonist's fate. The fact is that Posthumus has survived, and his oppressive misfortunes and sense of guilt for them are enough to provoke his family's complaint to the gods on his behalf. It seems extraordinary that the play suddenly materializes a family for Posthumus, one which seems to emerge from the classical underworld of the shades. Like the ghosts Virgil's Aeneas visits, they bring with them the gloom of the troubles which visited them during life. They recognize in the living reality of Posthumus and his loyal wife Imogen the second chance at happiness the Romances provide, and actively intervene in his fate because the son who still lives at last deserves earthly happiness.

The vision of Posthumus uncovers an Anglo-Saxon depth of grief over losses in battle, almost an English national characteristic, as the spontaneous banding together of Belarius and Cymbeline's two sons and Posthumus in the "narrow lane," at a moment where the Britons are in full retreat and Cymbeline has been captured, functions much like an Anglo-Saxon comitatus. The bravery Posthumus shows during the battle becomes the "mainspring" which opens the lid on the sealed tomb of grief and sorrow that has deprived Posthumus of his family for all of his life. He redeems his family's chance at happiness with his courage. Shakespeare seems to have it both ways emotionally: the Romance structure of reunion and reconciliation works throughout the war and calls up the ancient battle-virtues of the Britons, and then an indictment of the grief and the losses war brings is implicit in the visitation of Jupiter to Posthumus.

Because Cymbeline happens to be a Romance, the deeper wounds of his family's grief will heal for the only "living" representative of the Leonati. The very fact that his family are dramatically engaged and fighting for his happiness lends a human dimension to the otherworldly, and brings to us the fundamental emotional conviction that Posthumus' chances for happiness are good. Cymbeline pursues a symbolic national triumph by vindicating British character with the victory of the Britons over the Romans, which serves to unify the play and make it a showcase of British national virtues.[7] The vein of protest concerning the losses war brings is strong, however. At the end of the battle, the handsomest thing Britain can do is forgive Rome for its territorial aggression, and does so, when the Britons decide that integration within the overarching peace of the Roman empire is preferable to defiance. Britain can be magnanimous in victory, just as Posthumus, a victor himself (but one who needs a lot of forgiving), gets to forgive once. The confessed and contrite Iachimo has his life spared by Posthumus: "Live and deal with others better" (V.v.418-19).

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[7] Knight, The Crown of Life, pp. 129-67.

The "cognitio" reveals to nearly all the assembled characters that they are related by birth, marriage, or loyalty to the sovereign. All parts of the riddle found on the tablet on Posthumus' chest are neatly solved, and at the same time all the members of the kingdom's extended family are reconciled to each other, and thus the theme of reconciliation, which the gaoler first expresses--that "we were all of one mind, and that mind good"--extends to the harmony of all nations living in peace with Rome, a reflection on earth of Renaissance cosmic harmony.[8]

The gaolers bring back into the Romances the stream of puns and word-play characteristic of the clown population in Shakespeare. The joking here is about hanging and death, and it signals again the spirit of play in language, which carries so much implicit forgiveness which then becomes explicit at the end of this Romance. The gaoler-clowns make as much of a joke of the finality of execution as they can, but eventually the First gaoler laments the strict punishment of the law and hopes wistfully for a forgiving judgement for all mankind and its sinfulness, one which would not take human life and would be more forgiving. To some extent, the first Gaoler's prayer is answered by the reconciliation of Britain with Rome, which is a reconciliation with the rest of the world. Yet Cymbeline says patriotism has cost more than it was worth:

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[8] E.M.W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture, London: Chatto and Windus, 1967, pp. 82-84.

> CYMBELINE we submit to Caesar
> And to the Roman empire; promising
> To pay our wonted tribute from the which
> We were dissuaded by our wicked queen
> Whom heavens in justice both on her, and hers,
> Have laid most heavy hand.
> (V.v.461-66)

Patriotism gives place to a harmonious temporal, and thus harmonious spiritual order.

Cymbeline seems to put forward the idea of an ascending chain of nations with Britain one of the outlying provinces ruled by Rome at the centre of the Roman Empire, an order which finds its analogue in The Great Chain of Being. For now, the Roman empire is the best world order that can be devised, and one which the Britons must join for the sake of harmony among nations.

The blocking characters of Shakespeare's first two Romances are still within the range of Shakespeare's other comic antagonists. Antiochus and his daughter might seem less folkloric when placed beside the folkloric characters of wicked queen and wicked stepson, yet they are probably no more realistic than the minotaur Theseus confronts in the labyrinth. In Cymbeline, however, the wicked queen dies in despair over the evil she cannot do, which is comic, if one thinks about it, and leads to a satisfying story-book end of a villain. Cloten dies a death which would be appropriate in "Jack the Giant-Killer." That is, Cloten, who is a boasting alazon kind of comic antagonist, has his shouting, quarrelling head cut off, an end which serves him with the story-book justice tailored to the amount of noise he makes. Also, if we can take him that seriously as a character, Cloten is a violent chauvinist and a comic overreacher because he (unlike Falstaff) challenges the true prince about royal prerogatives. Cloten seems to point up the moral of Feste's song in the Epilogue of Twelfth Night: "By swaggering could I never thrive" (V.i.388).

We have far less trouble justifying the deaths of Cloten and the wicked Queen Mother than we do the banishment of Malvolio, for instance. The difference between a Middle Comedy antagonist and a Romance antagonist demonstrates how delicately the balance is maintained by Shakespeare between the individual antagonist and the world he inhabits. Critics find good things to say about Cloten's sturdy patriotism and critical things to say about Malvolio's love-suit, yet Cloten never considers the rights of other women, if they get in the way of the maternal prerogative, and he tries to bash his way to the woman he wants. Malvolio, on the other hand, pursues Olivia with what he thinks are "clear lights of favor." Malvolio seems to be the comic antagonist who is badly treated, but the reasons for his gulling are quite apparent in Twelfth Night, just as the reasons for the death of the blustering but dangerous Cloten seem inevitable in Cymbeline.

The heroes and heroines of Romance seem far more resilient in far more threatening environments than their counterparts in the Early and Middle Comedies. The treatment of Imogen at court, for example, is abominable: her husband is banished, her father tries to annul her first marriage and force her to accept another husband, and her wicked stepmother plots her death. Like Marina, she depends on her own initiative to rescue herself from her dilemma, and picks the Middle Comedy option of going into male disguise. She hides her femininity in the dangerous world she inhabits until the "cognitio" in Act V, whereas Marina in Pericles lets her divinely feminine virtues and accomplishments shine forth. It is as a fully accomplished woman, independent and skilled in all virtuous arts, that Marina meets her father in the harbour of Mytilene; Imogen is loved for her gentleness and her domestic skills, but she must stay in the background until she is able to reveal her identity to her husband. Marina is thus the better example of self-sustaining skill and courage, and of the dignity and virtue of the feminine in the first two Romances.

VII. The Winter's Tale and The Tempest: Mortality Accepted

Pericles and Cymbeline are the last of Shakespeare's Comedies and Romances with obvious and unmistakable comic antagonists. In the final two Romances it is more difficult to place comic villainy: the misfortunes Hermione and Perdita suffer in The Winter's Tale are brought on by Leontes' madness, which causes as much pity as it does anger. In The Tempest Miranda is protected from the grosser machinations of her father's enemies, who are certainly villains, but in the political sphere, which threatens to intrude on the romantic sphere. Comic blocking characters, who attract comic revenge like lightning rods and leave their plays sweeter for their comic punishment, give place to the heroines, Hermione, Perdita, and Miranda, who redeem their plays with more passive roles.

The Romance isolation and testing of character which Marina and Imogen must endure in Pericles and Cymbeline intensifies with Hermione in The Winter's Tale and shifts to the isolation and testing of character of Prospero's enemies in The Tempest, where Miranda's enemies are exposed as usurpers. Feminine qualities which were admired in the earlier Romances, but only partly efficacious there, become powerful means of redemption in the last two Romances. Heroines no longer stand for certain virtues, but instead themselves become those enabling virtues. Hermione, Perdita, and Miranda are the means to redemption of the comic worlds they inhabit, and all comic antagonism is subsumed in what they come to represent.

In The Winter's Tale (1610), Leontes exists both as a comic protagonist and a comic antagonist eventually reconciled to and reconciling others to the comedy matrix he inhabits. Leontes is two different beings, two different husbands, and two different fathers on either side of a play divided in the middle by the Chorus of Father Time. It is difficult to compare a Leontes caught in the grip of an insane jealousy to a humbly joyful and grateful Leontes so willing to take in and protect Florizel and Perdita from the *senex* wrath of the king he has banished, Polixenes. Of course, Leontes does not know one of the lovers is his abandoned daughter Perdita, but like Pericles, Leontes must glimpse the vernal renewal his daughter represents before he can be judged by Paulina as ready for re-union with his wife.

The discovery of Perdita begins to heal the split in Leontes' consciousness (a remorseful man in need of forgiveness but beyond it) by representing to him in the person of his daughter the difference between reality and appearance so profoundly that he will never mistake the two again. Perdita proves, as her mother does later in a more spectacular fashion, that death is an illusion we nevertheless see and give reality to. St. Paul offers the same warning and reassurance in I Corinthians:

> But some men will say, How are the dead raised up?
> And with what body do they come?
> Then fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened,
> except it die:
> And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body
> that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of
> wheat,
> or of some other grain:
> But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and
> to every seed his own body.
> (I Corinthians 16:35-8).

Through metaphor, St. Paul is attempting to explain the change from the material to the spiritual body: this transformation is the germination of the "seed," which we do not see because it is buried in the ground to germinate there.

Shakespeare creates the illusion of the absence created by death in the abandonment of Perdita and the death of Hermione; that is, in the banishment of Perdita and the assumed death of Hermione. Hermione represents that "absence" which characterizes the search for family and identity from The Comedy of Errors up to the banished family of Prospero. Hermione leaves the play by an illusion of death, and Leontes comes to her tomb every day to renew his grief:

> Once a day I'll visit
> The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there
> Shall be my recreation.
> (III.iii. 238-40)

Hermione has had to mock "death" in life before she is (Leontes thinks) placed in the tomb. Her "death" represents one side of the paradox of "eternal life" at the center of the illusion of death St. Paul describes to his listeners in

I Corinthians. "Life" imitates death, and "death" is the last image of Hermione Leontes carries away. So Leontes must live with this illusion and with his own repentance for sixteen years. At the end of his repentance, he is permitted to see another image of Hermione: a vision of her as an inanimate statue, "death" mocking life. This is the other side of a coin with the same image stamped on both sides, or the "other side" of the New Testament paradox of eternal life:

> PAULINA As she lived peerless
> So her dead likeness, I do well believe,
> Excels whatever yet you look'd upon,
> Or hand of man hath done; therefore I keep it
> Lonely apart. But here it is: prepare
> To see the life as lively mocked as ever
> Still sleep mocked death: behold, and say 'tis well.
> [Paulina draws a curtain and discovers
> Hermione standing like a statue]
> (V.iii.14-26)

Hermione remains her living self (but that fact is unknown to Leontes): dramatically speaking, she is still in the first half of the play and separated by the Chorus of Father Time from the second half. Metaphorically, Hermione exists across the unbridgeable gulf separating life and death, but in actuality she is simply the completion of St. Paul's paradox, or the other side of the coin stamped with exactly the same likeness, life or death. Life seems like death, because for Leontes the statue is only an inanimate object which imitates a living likeness.

PAULINA I like your silence, it the more shows off

Your wonder; but yet speak; first you, my
liege.
Comes it not something near?
LEONTES Her natural posture!
Chide me, dear stone, that I may say indeed
Thou art Hermione, or rather, thou art she
In thy not chiding, for she was as tender
As infancy and grace. But yet, Paulina,
Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing
So aged as this seems.
POLIXENES O, not by much
PAULINA So much the more our carver's excellence,
Which lets go by some sixteen years and makes
her
As she liv'd now.
(V.iii.21-34)

When Leontes observes Hermione from the extraordinary vantage point of a man who can get confirmation of his wife's aging from his dearest friend Polixenes, with whom he has been newly reconciled, the audience recognizes the familiar Shakespearean theme of time destroying beauty in a specifically dramatic context. The theme had appeared perhaps fifteen years before in Shakespeare's sonnet sequence, especially in the first seventeen sonnets. These sonnets, plus later ones, deal with the difficulty of accepting St. Paul's assertion that both life and love are eternal. Sonnet 116, for example, is the single most important answer from the Shakespeare canon of the eternal nature of love, an answer which Paulina's strict planning and Hermione's nearly despairing acquiesence eventually eternizes.

Shakespeare's advice to the "young man" in the first seventeen sonnets incorporates the themes of aging and of eternizing love. Shakespeare tells him, whoever he might be, to pass on his own physical beauty in his children. Assuming the sonnets have their own fictional independence, the advice contained in them could be given to either sex. To own a lease of beauty in perpetuity is to pass it on to one's children, a strategy for defeating mortality. One lets go of beauty in order to possess it eternally: the beauty is given up by being passed on to the next generation.

In Sonnet 13 especially, Shakespeare follows through the metaphor of "landlord" and "tenant," implying that the physical body is what one holds in lease from the landlord who is "God" or "The Creator." Shakespeare also implies that God pursues as a conscious purpose birth into a world of time and decay so that we can go the way all things on earth do, the way of release from youth to age. This seems to be Shakespeare's purpose in having Leontes notice that Hermione has reached middle age and suffered the ravages of time Shakespeare speaks of in Sonnet 2:

> When forty winters shall besiege thy brow
> And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,
> Thy youth's proud livery, so gazed on now,
> Will be a tottered weed of small worth held.
> (1-4)

In the sonnets and The Winter's Tale, Shakespeare is building an important paradox from the concept of "decay" as a conscious divine purpose, which is the foundation of the sonnet advice to the "young man."

If we think about the explanation of St. Paul concerning death and eternal life, death is a seeming obstacle, but for Hermione, no obstacle at all. Both her "transgressions" and her "death" are illusions; during her trial, she tells her husband she cannot fight against an illusion which has taken so strong a hold on his mind:

> HERMIONE Sir,
> You speak a language that I understand not,
> My life stands in the level of your dreams,
> Which I'll lay down.
> LEONTES Your actions are my dreams.
> You had a bastard by Polixines
> And I but dreamed it.
> (III.ii.79-84)

What she says to Leontes is both a warning and a statement of reality. She warns her husband that his distorted perspective will take him deeper into error, and she makes a statement recognizing that she will be defeated by an illusion of evil which is too strong, at this time, to defeat. Yet we cannot help but be reminded of John 15:13:

> Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Mutatis mutandis regarding the gender of the Biblical passage, we can see the same quality of love at work with Hermione, who even sacrifices her children, her marriage, and her happiness to her husband's hideous obsession. The illusion of Hermione's transgression is on the same level as the illusion of her death, an illusion that we might hesitate to call an object-lesson for Leontes but that nevertheless carries its own poetic justice. Leontes must learn that remorse does not complete the process of forgiveness. Repentance, which comes after, is akin to mourning, or is, as St. Paul says, the time when we grieve for our sins. Leontes' Paulina-imposed sixteen years of repentance convey to us in the "distortion" of symbolic language the "divinity" in the process of reconciliation, whether we call it a healing non-intervention, which points in the direction of the divine (Shakespeare's clown-population shows many non-interventionist characteristics), or the force of "great creating nature" itself to fill the gaps created in time by misfortune and madness.

The themes of "landlord" and "tenant" are represented in the metaphor of the decaying mansion in Sonnet 146, based on an assertion made by St. Paul (and Ovid whom he paraphrases) that the desires of the flesh war with the spirit (Galatians 6:17), and that the body we get (the decaying mansion we inherit) is what we must be satisfied with. Shakespeare converts his advice-giving in the first seventeen sonnets into an explicitly religious theme in this sonnet. The improvements to the "mansion" of the body are meant to stave off the effects of decay and keep youth and beauty in full repair. The sonnet's wisdom is to "let go" the maintenance on the property we lease, the "mansion" which is the "landlord's," or God's, responsibility anyway. The victory Shakespeare offers in the wisdom of "release" in the sonnets is the wisdom St. Paul offers in I Corinthians 15:26:

> So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the

> saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in
> victory.
>
> (I. Corinthians 16:54)

That is the victory Shakespeare offers us in the theme of "releasing" in his sonnets.

Because Leontes has learned spiritual humility from his suffering, he is grateful for the return of Hermione complete with the effects of aging. If he were not grateful and humble, he would never be permitted to see the progress of years reflected in Hermione's face: Paulina would know that his jealousy still smoldered, and she would not let Hermione be discovered on her pedestal. If Leontes still objected to the process of "decay," his jealousy would continue as a projection of his wife's "sinfulness," a projection of his own unwillingness to accept the fallen condition of mankind, and a way of suddenly blaming Hermione for the sinfulness and death all humanity must cope with.[1] If Shakespeare is writing The Winter's Tale from a theological perspective, as I think, then the mystery of Leontes' sudden jealousy towards his innocent wife becomes explicable. The theological explanation works better than the explanation that a dramatic justification is lacking for Leontes' jealousy on the grounds that Shakespeare deserted his source (Greene's Pandosto) and left out the motive for Leontes' jealousy which exists there.

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[1] Robert N. Watson. Shakespeare and the Hazards of Ambition. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981, pp. 226-78.

Shakespeare's romance is far subtler in its dramatic motivations than Greene's. Leontes is fighting a universal condition (sin and death) he cannot defeat or evade. His jealousy is self-wounding, and only after a period of living with its consequences and with a growing wish for forgiveness, is he ready to be reunited with Hermione. When his rage to transcend mortality (projected as an accusation of his wife) fades to a poignant desire to be reunited with the family members his jealousy has scattered and lost, he is ready to become a partner with Hermione once more.

When Leontes becomes a towering comic antagonist of the "self-blocking" kind, he madly destroys everything he had previously cherished and built up over the years of his happy married life. Determined to battle with a condition of mortality that is not in his power nor in his mortal self-interest to defeat, he looks desperately for a way to stave off a natural process he shares with every living thing around him.

Also failing in "faith," Antigonus adopts Leontes' conviction of Hermione's unfaithfulness: he thinks he hears the voice of Hermione admitting her guilt, but his vision is false, and is perhaps a projection or a way of rationalizing the failure of his own moral courage. After Antigonus complies with the unjust royal command to expose Perdita, he is then overwhelmed by the chaotic disorder he has yielded to by failing to obey a higher moral law and save the child.

Being torn apart by a bear, as appallingly funny as the description by the Shepherd's son is, becomes a symbolic action of the forces of the primitive unconscious which overwhelm Antigonus in his fecklessness.

He goes the same way as the drowning mariners, who are swallowed up in a raging sea. The sea is often a symbol for the forces of the unconscious. A tempest can exist in the mind and in the spirit as well as on the face of the sea:

> Now the ship boring the moon with her main-mast and anon swallowed with yeast and froth, as you'ld thrust a cork into a hogshead. And then for the land service--to see how the bear tore out his shoulder-bone, how he cried to me for help and said his name was Antigonus, a nobleman. But to make an end of the ship--to see how the sea flap-dragoned it. But first how the poor souls roared, and the sea mocked them, and how the poor gentleman roared and the bear mocked him, both roaring louder than the sea or weather.
>
> (III.iii.83-97)

The Shepherd's son sees both catastrophes from the vantage point of a man close to the beach. The scene demonstrates a skillful tragic-comic balance, so skillful that it seems coincidental, rather than a disruption of the natural order, as it would be in King Lear. Tragedy is balanced against comedy, because Perdita is found by the Shepherd at the same moment that a nobleman perishes on land and sailors at sea. Nevertheless, her accusers and abandoners perish in the tempestuousness of their own false vision of her--or at least something like that seems to be taking place--so that on a symbolic level Shakespeare has arranged dramatic events in such a way that they seem to tie together in cause and effect. They tie together in stronger links than one finds in Pericles, yet there too, seemingly disconnected events build to a thematic unity.

Perdita brings good fortune to the Shepherd and his sons; she grows in grace and nature so that her life lends beauty and distinction to the Shepherd's life as well as bringing him a fortune in gold. In The Merchant of Venice, Salerio's imaginative vision of shipwreck is shaped in free-flowing feminine lines:

> Should I go the church
> And see the holy edifice of stone
> And not bethink me straight of dangerous rocks,
> Which touching but my gentle vessel's side
> Would scatter all her spices on the stream,
> Enrobe the roaring waters with my silks--
> (I.i.29-34)

In The Winter's Tale Perdita becomes the actualization of that sudden graceful vision of the sea. She is the sea at rest:

> FLORIZEL When you do dance, I wish you
> A wave o' th' sea, that you might ever do
> Nothing but that, move still, still so,
> And own no other function.
> (IV.iv.140-3)

Perdita's dancing is as comforting and endless as the waves of a calm sea gently rocking a ship at anchor. The forces of the unconscious which the storm at sea represents (to use a 20th Century Jungian term), or translated into dramatic terms, the murderous rage brought to the surface in Leontes, is transmuted in this benign pastoral environment to the gentle embrace of a calm sea, endless and graceful in its motion. Thus Perdita becomes allied with a powerful force of nature. Murderous rage is calmed with love, and the energy given over to destructiveness is devoted to the fertile acceptance of Florizel's love by Perdita.

Senex rage occurs in the second half of _The Winter's Tale_ when Polixenes follows the "blocking character" lead of his youthful friend King Leontes and explodes at his son's devotion to the shepherdess Perdita. But the cruel and elaborate torture Polixenes threatens Perdita with does not have the same effect on his listeners that Leontes' rage did. Perdita listens to Polixenes' threats, but her emotions and her inner security remain unchanged:

> PERDITA Even here undone!
> I was not much afeard; for once or twice
> I was about to speak and tell him plainly
> The selfsame sun that shines upon his court
> Hides not his visage from our cottage but
> Looks on all alike.
> (IV.iv.435-40)

Perdita does worry about being wooed by a prince and the consequences if Florizel's love should be discovered by his father, but not at all about her emotions being against the royal decree. Polixenes' rage only serves to make Perdita resentful of his snobbishness.

Just as Leontes is the only blocking character in the Sicilian half of _The Winter's Tale_, so Polixenes is the only blocking character in the Bohemia part of the Romance. Even though Polixenes has had to flee from the rage of Leontes, he himself later turns into an unreasonable and tyrannical monarch blocking the expression of love. His angry snobbery is as close to the senex type as can be: the colossal contradiction is that just before he turns on the young couple, he admires Perdita's unaffected nobility and grace. He remarks that these are far beyond her station, and then he threatens her with death by torture if she dares to love his son.

At this point we might ask ourselves the question: What if Antigonus' vision happened to be true? Does Shakespeare offer any imaginative exploration of betrayal in love? The answer is that Shakespeare was always searching for profounder forms of charity. We must turn back to the sonnets for the real or fictional triangle of "Dark Lady," author, and friend to understand the dislocations of such an arrangement, which Shakespeare does not condemn. Shakespeare's helplessness in the face of a double betrayal is expressed in terms of financial contracts, mortgages, and wills; these economic metaphors lead to the most complicated financial catastrophes.

Yet before Shakespeare abandons these emotional complications altogether, he makes an attempt at expressing the "charity" of his "Dark Lady" in Sonnet 152:

> For I have sworn deep oaths of thy deep kindness,
> Oaths of thy love, thy truth, thy constancy;
> And to enlighten thee, gave eyes to blindness,
> Or made them swear against the thing they see;
> For I have sworn thee fair: more perjured eye,
> To swear against the truth so foul a lie.
> (9-14).

New love means new hate to an old love, but even though new oaths of love are founded on perjury to an earlier love, the speaker declares that his Dark Lady's love has really been deep constancy and kindness. In spite of the assertion that a declaration of such qualities of love would be a lie, he makes the assertion anyway. He perjures the truth to state another truth.

This fictional vision of a complicated love-relationship in the sonnets may be set next to the nearly tragic illusion of Leontes in The Winter's Tale. From the non-dramatic genre of the sonnet sequence (Sonnets 128 to 154) we discover that Shakespeare's persona never really finds a resolution to the dilemma. He simply copes with it the best he can, and out of it manages to express the "charity" of that love, even though he knows that every positive assertion he makes about this love is immediately qualified by irony and the lovers' hypocrisy. Shakespeare's plea is for a spiritual tolerance, for charity, as qualified and fault-ridden as it may be. If nothing else, Shakespeare says that the Dark Lady has shown "kindness" to love him, an assertion which above all defines her love as charitable. Of course, St. Paul's definition of "charity" in I Corinthians, charity which "suffereth long," is "kind" and "not easily provoked" is the kind of love which characterizes Hermione. She represents enduring bravery in the face of ugly accusations, a bravery which eventually rebukes Leontes for the unseemliness and evil thinking of his terrible illusion.

We must go to Sonnet 116 if we are to find the love Hermione represents, love an unimaginable distance removed from the accusations and self-accusations of the last thirty-six of Shakespeare's sonnets. Sonnet 116 returns us to Paulina's spectacular staging of visual proof that love itself does not age, even if Hermione does.

> Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
> Within his bending sickle's compass come;
> Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
> But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
> (116. 9-12)

Love loves in spite of all, even to the end of time. The first quatrain presents us with a mimetic action of diminishing love, love which fades with time:

> Let me not to the marriage of true minds
> Admit impediments; love is not love
> Which alters when it alteration finds
> Or bends with the remover to remove.
> (1-4)

While the action of the verb "remove" is non-specific, the diminishing of love itself becomes a mirror image of an inward reality, reflecting outwardly the change which has occurred unseen within, and reflecting what the mutual falsehood of Sonnet 138 would deny.

Hermione does not attempt to justify herself when Leontes accuses and imprisons her. Instead, she simply tells him he is in the grip of a terrible illusion and does nothing more to justify herself. She knows that love must be mutual, and more importantly, that love is sufficient unto itself. The ability of erroneous love to "remove" with the remover, or to evince an imitation of itself has no effect on the strength of Hermione's love. On the other hand, Antigonus' conception of Hermione changes as he listens to Leontes, and eventually reflects the desolation that he has been exposed to in Leontes' soul. So he exposes Perdita on a barren coastland, whereas Hermione's faith in love exists beyond the reality she is confronted with, so she does not waver in her loyalty to her daughter.

The dramatic movement of Leontes' awareness follows the last two verses of I Corinthians 13, where St. Paul describes how the full awareness of love comes to us at last:

> For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known.
>
> And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

Leontes is blocked from his own married happiness by a tyrannical illusion: he suddenly sees his wife through a glass darkly, through the obfuscating medium of jealousy and finally, after sixteen years, "face to face" again, without the obscurity his own sense of sin projected on her produces. During the statue-scene he notes every detail in her beloved features (which seem to be reflected in a static work of art), clearly, without emotional distortion, before he is reunited with her. His faith, which Paulina "awakens," moves through the diminution of the first quatrain of Sonnet

116 in the first two acts of The Winter's Tale, and then to the second quatrain, which is the anterior period of Perdita's growing-up years in Bohemia and represents Perdita herself:

> O, no, it is an ever-fixed mark
> That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
> It is the star to every wandering bark,
> Whose worth's unknown although his height be taken.
> (5-8)

When we search the comic matrix of the Shakespearean canon, we discover that Shakespeare gave dramatic life to many of the themes we find in his non-dramatic poetry. In The Winter's Tale Shakespeare continued the search for a definition of "charity" in love, and the endeavour was a comic one, because love and charity are the spirit that is infused in so much of Shakespeare's drama, and virtually all of his comedy. One of the reasons for the world's love of his work emerges if we approach his work as indivisible, all of a piece, whatever the "genre" may be. That is, Shakespeare worked in common dramatic statements in the genres of comedy, tragedy, and history, and it is the task of Shakespearean critics to discover what these statements have in common. One approach to such an attempt may be through the common "matrix" of all of his written works. This is the approach I have taken with The Winter's Tale. By this time Shakespeare has moved a staggering distance in the force and subtlety of the comic antagonists he creates. Character "blocks" have become inward, and become part of

Shakespeare's endeavour to define and give dramatic presence to spiritual realities. His comic antagonists are now a long way removed from the earthy and easily outmaneuvered blocking characters of Greek Old Comedy and Roman New comedy, and, to some extent, the Early and Middle Comedies, although Shakespeare gave depth and pathos to his earliest plot-and-theme dominated blocking characters too.

The Tempest presents in a comprehensive way practically all the comic antagonisms we have encountered in the rest of Shakespeare's comedies. Afterwards, Shakespeare returns to the history genre in Henry VIII, a play which is neither Romance nor comedy but does partake of the remote hopes and new life of the former genre. The Tempest gives the reader a suggestion of many of the comic antagonists in the rest of his comedies, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say the play suggests a strategy which gets around the play's dramatis personae who display the characteristics of several different kinds of comic antagonist. For example, nothing prevents Ferdinand and Miranda from plighting troths to each other except the pseudo-senex objections of Prospero, who assumes the senex role to test their love. Miranda does the actual proposing, but she simply makes the suggestion which is already in her mind and Ferdinand's. Prospero is interested in humbling the pride of his enemies, but he also wants to arrange a reconciling marriage between his daughter and the King of Naples' son. Like King Simonides in

Pericles, Prospero is really delighted when Miranda falls in love with Ferdinand at first sight:

> It goes on, I see
> As my spirit prompts it. Spirit, fine spirit, I'll free thee
> Within two days for this.
> (I.ii.420-2)

Although Prospero assumes the _senex_ role, his delaying action takes the form of a political accusation:

> Thou dost here usurp
> The name thou ow'st not, and hast put thyself
> Upon this island as a spy, to win it
> From me, the lord on't.
> (I.ii.450-7)

Ironically, this is the same resentment Caliban voices. Practically his first words in the play are a complaint to Prospero that the island has been stolen from him:

> For I am all the subjects that you have,
> Which first was mine own king; and here you sty me
> In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
> The rest o' the island.
> (I.ii.361-4)

What Caliban calls an usurpation Prospero regards as a fight between good and evil, a struggle between the light of civilization and the darkness of a life benighted with ignorance. From the beginning of the play, there are thus two comic antagonists with two equal claims to justification for the antagonism they feel towards each other.

In Prospero's and Miranda's minds, Caliban is a failure of the civilizing process. Caliban can be taught knowledge, but not the virtues of respect and obedience to the power and knowledge which dispense civilization. Also, Caliban does not respect Miranda's virtue, so in Prospero's opinion, Caliban is at best only doing a bad imitation of civilization, and has become more vicious through the scraps of knowledge he has acquired. Yet Prospero himself might have learned a lesson from a previous mimetic process of learning, a lesson his usurping brother Antonio should have taught him:

> Hence his ambition growing. . . .
> To have no screen between this part he played
> And him he played it for, he needs will be
> Absolute Milan.
> (I.ii.105-9)

When Prospero's brother Antonio is given all the power of the Dukedom of Milan, he rules as Prospero's deputy until he begins to think he is not the substitute, but the Duke himself.

Prospero has made the elementary political mistake of transferring power de facto to his brother. Power is what counts. Titles are only the emblems of the power they represent, so Prospero gives his brother everything that matters in day-to-day nobility, and like Lear, keeps only the two half-shells of the egg after the chick has hatched. What Prospero gains in return for his abdication is ingratitude, but he also learns an elementary lesson in the cost of being politically naive, apathetic, and preoccupied: he learns not to do it again. Miranda's sudden flare of resentment at the "savage" who tried to rape her is in the same vein as Prospero's continuing resentment, and the reason many critics and editors think the speech should be attributed to Prospero instead of Miranda:

MIRANDA . . . I pitied thee,
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
One thing or other: when thou didst not, savage,
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes
With words that made them known. But thy vile race,
Though thou didst learn, had that in't which good natures
Could not abide to be with; therefore wast thou
Deservedly confined into this rock, who hadst
Deserved more than a prison.
(I.ii.353-62)

The resentment is towards Caliban's ingratitude, which seems a particularly sore point in Prospero's consciousness, and not in the consciousness of the wondering, grateful daughter.

Early in the play the role and the accusation of "usurper" are passed around pretty thoroughly. What Prospero accuses Antonio of is what Caliban accuses Prospero of, yet one was an usurpation by default, and the other was an usurpation of disillusionment. Both have compromising circumstances: if Prospero did not want his dukedom to begin with, why shouldn't Antonio keep it for himself? And if a man and his daughter are cast up on shore on a desert island against their will, and their open-hearted and unsuspecting attempt at civilizing an indigenous population is met with constant defiance and bad faith, why not repay it with subjection? The self-justification of the usurper as opposed to the usurped peeps through in both instances of usurpation.

Nevertheless, Caliban is allied with the ecology of the island, and Prospero builds a structure of civilization on one barren corner of it, complete with the synedochic "logs" and wooden dishes which suggest a civilized, central household. Prospero's patch of civilization takes its ecological toll on the island: he is cutting down trees to keep himself warm and cook his food, whereas Caliban seems to live in better harmony with his environment before he learns to exploit its resources for Prospero's household. Why does Prospero need Caliban for chores? If his magic is all-powerful he can supply his daily needs without the help of an earthly servant. Perhaps Prospero gives Caliban "duties" because it fits into the slow process of civilization he is trying to teach him, a civilization which is changing nature's face on one part of an island of shifting perspectives.

Caliban's chores are perhaps a part of the play to suggest the European colonizing of the New World, the history of which was recorded in the accounts of Spanish conquistadors. The destruction of Central and South American Indian civilizations was already a part of the European memory, because by 1610 colonial domination of the Caribbean had been well established. Raleigh's Virginia colony had been attempted several years before. This was all common knowledge, and as well-known to the Jacobean Englishman as the destruction of the forests of the Amazon in Brazil are known to us today. In 1588 the English had also beaten back a Spanish Armada financed with gold from the New World, and the English had made a rich harvest of Spanish galleons on their way back to Spain, their holds filled with gold and silver from New World mines and easy prey for Drake's "legal" pirates. Could Shakespeare imagine the resentment of indigenous peoples at the receiving end of a colonial lash? Certainly, and he suggests as much with the character of Caliban.

What about Caliban's role as potential lover of Miranda? His attempted rape, at least in comic terms, places him in the category of an unwanted and unsuccessful suitor. Still, he thinks of Miranda not as a sex object but as a natural means of self-assertion for himself: "I had peopled this isle else with Calibans." His methods are definitely chauvinist, but he does imagine Miranda as partner and helpmate in his own version of civilization building. With some modifications, we find exactly the same theme in Shakespeare's advice to his friend in Sonnets 1-17. Caliban's sexual impulses are a surprise to the father and daughter, but they should not be. Miranda is beautiful enough to be desired by many, including Caliban. The power and control over the lives of others she represents through the authority of her father helps to make her an object of desire, an ideal of privilege and prestige to be sought

Caliban quite naturally wishes for the assimilation that Miranda represents; Miranda's innocence shields her from this fact, which is a measure of the tact Shakespeare uses in his drama, but The Tempest is a play rife with implications: we are compelled to rethink the situations of all the characters constantly.

Where Miranda is the only choice open to Caliban, she herself has a greater choice of suitors, and her choice is a good one: a man, but also a prince and heir to the kingdom of Naples, complete with all the qualities of the courtier. Caliban might refuse to imitate his betters in civilized graces, but he does try to re-establish his own kingdom; he grasps at the opportunity to overthrow his oppressors as soon as he can, and he seems to fit the pattern of a jailed nationalist who is incorrigible in his attempts to overthrow colonial oppression. We scarcely see Prospero as an oppressor, but we do remember he has no sympathy for Caliban's claim, concerned as he is with regaining the secular power he has lost and bringing about a change of heart in his enemies. Instead, we see him as a father and a ruler doing his best to marry his daughter well and control or change the ambitions of his enemies. If Prospero thinks of the island as his own, he does so only in so far as the island furthers his own plans: the island is the means to return Prospero to the mainland (more for his daughter's sake than for himself), and exists as a staging area for the completion of his plans. The fact that most critics see Prospero as centered on the island, and as an all-powerful figure on his stage world does not concern us as much here--we are trying to see how the character of Prospero relates to specifically comic aims.

This is the only Shakespearean play in which a controlling society of usurpers is brought to the man whose position in society has been usurped, and there put under his control. Prospero is the ultimate _eiron_, a man whose power has been hidden from his enemies until he chooses to use it. The usurping society is represented by Prospero's brother Antonio and by Alonzo, the king of Naples, who banished Prospero and his daughter twelve years before. Antonio is Prospero's truly dangerous enemy, not only because he has used his ambition to usurp his brother's dukedom, but, more importantly, because he wants to pass on this knowledge to another younger brother who is also second in line for a crown. Shakespeare successfully isolates for our scrutiny the consequences of the mimetic process of learning to do as others do, not as we would have them do unto us, by letting us know what could happen if ambition were free to do whatever it wanted. Prospero encourages the "imitation" of good in the play but tries to change the "imitation" of bad by changing the hearts of his enemies. What the play questions is a potential which exists and is carried around in the mind, and which Prospero may or may not permit to become a waking reality.

Although Antonio's influence is indirect, his island ambitions would be as much a block to the reconciling marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda as his ambitions against Prospero have been, and his ambition for Sebastian could be. If he could make his ambitions come true, he would block Ferdinand's succession as effectively as Claudius blocks the succession of Hamlet. In the context of the island, the absurdity of his ambition emerges clearly: he is marooned on a desert island with no hope of rescue, and there is no Italian kingdom to rule over even if he were successful with his plan. Nevertheless, the dangerous nature of his ambitions must be controlled. His reference is still Machiavellian and European because his plan points clearly to the changes that will already have taken place when he and Sebastian return to Italy. The plan implies no doubt whatever of this return.

In Shakespearean comedy there seems to be a law of "dreaming" which The Tempest often tests: dreams can mingle the boundaries of two different fictional worlds and enrich both worlds through the experience, but to make a dream a waking reality violates the equilibrium of the aesthetic experience dreams bring about. For example, when Bottom moves to the center of Titania's enchanted world, the grace of the Fairy world touches the earthly needs and concrete concerns of the Athenian mechanical's world. Both worlds together produce something which rises like an island in the middle of the sea, and becomes more substantial than what existed before. The mingling produces a scene more tender than Titania's world and more refined than Bottom's world, even though the more civilized and humble figure in the play is probably Bottom. In A Midsummer Night's Dream, dreams are fruitful as long as they remain in the matrix of potentiality from which they originate. Dreams can mix and do each other no permanent harm in Shakespearean comedy, but to make a dream a waking-world reality is a danger Shakespeare warns of repeatedly, because of the evanescent quality of the mimetic experience itself, which is what drama is made up of:

> You do look, my son, in a moved sort,
> As if you were dismayed: be cheerful, sir.
> Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
> As I foretold you, were all spirits and
> Are melted into air, into thin air;
> And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.
> (IV.i.146-58)

Prospero is speaking a revealing soliloquy on drama, a very beautiful one, and at the same time placing the insubstantiality and vanity of all men's ambitions into perspective. It is this perspective that points up the danger of Antonio's ill-contained ambitions. Antonio's ambition is linear, moving straight from one point to the next. By murder he would take the straightest path to the crown, as opposed to the curved line and the completeness of the sphere, which represents human life in its boundarilessness between waking and sleeping, life and death. Our individual lives are like "the great globe itself," curving back on themselves from birth to death, or from a "dream" of waking, which is the life of ambition and achievement, into sleep, where we return at the end of life. Prospero knows and speaks of the limits of ambition because, as the apprentice dramatist of the play, he knows the nature of the dramatic illusion itself. He becomes the dramatist speaking of the imaginative career of the playwright, as well as the comic protagonist caught up in the events of a strange and endlessly profound comedy.

This is the lesson Prospero successfully teaches Alonzo: the lesson taught to Shakespeare's other Romance protagonists, the humbling power of illusions. This is the lesson which Alonzo must grapple with during the time he thinks his son is drowned. The illusion brings about the repentance Prospero was hoping to see, and leaves Alonzo with a changed heart, which does not revert to its old ways when Ferdinand is restored to him. Alonzo wakes from the illusion of his son's drowning to "Heart's sorrow and a clear life ensuing," a waking reality which will become the standard for all the strangers who have come to Prospero's island.

Unfortunately, the lesson cannot be used with Antonio, because he and Sebastian live exclusively in an ambitious dream world of their own and remain unchanged by Prospero's intentions:

> ANTONIO Th' occasion speaks thee, and
> My strong imagination sees a crown
> Dropping upon thy head.
> SEBASTIAN What? Art thou waking?
> ANTONIO Do you not hear me speak?
> SEBASTIAN I do; and surely
> It is a sleepy language, and thou speak'st
> Out of thy sleep. What is it then dids't say?
> This is a strange repose, to be asleep
> With eyes open; standing, speaking, moving,
> And yet so fast asleep.
> (II.i.201-211)

If the boundaries between two different worlds of night enchantment mingle in A Midsummer Night's Dream, which is extraordinary enough, here the boundary between sleep and waking disappears in broad daylight, an even more extraordinary event. All of Alonzo's company except Antonio and Sebastian are asleep, but these two feel they are the sleepers at the center of a dream. They are. Both are deep in the toils of a dream of ambition, and their "dream" is being watched, although they do not know that yet. In the midst of their dream they would become doers and makers, "creating" with their ambition what is true in the imagination only, a new and different king of Naples. When Antonio begins to hint about doing a great favor for Sebastian, Sebastian replies with images of creation:

> SEBASTIAN Prithee say on.
> The setting of thine eye and cheek proclaim

A matter from thee; and a birth indeed,
Which throes thee much to yield.
(II.i.222-5)

The "birth" of Antonio's ambitious plan will require murder in the birthing, and make "what's past" into prologue and the future "In yours and my discharge." That is, they will (like Prospero), but without his perspective on the nature of illusion and reality, create their own mimetic version of reality, invert St. Paul's "death is like a sleep" and create a new waking reality.

ANTONIO How shall that Claribel
Measure us back to Naples? Keep in Tunis,
And let Sebastian wake! Say this were death
That now hath seized them, why, they were no worse
Than now they are. . .O that you bore
The mind that I do. What a sleep were this
For your advancement! Do you understand me?
(II.i.252-63)

Antonio's ambitious "creating" mind persuades Sebastian to stop their enemies' criticisms, cut off the blocks to Sebastian's ambitions, and, in a mimetic subversion of divine creation, change reality for a Machiavellian version of it with "one word." Like God, Antonio and Sebastian would form the human order, the entire created order, with one command, and create the world they desire on the _tabula rasa_ of what they think is an uninhabited island:

ANTONIO Draw together,
And when I rear my hand, do you the like,
To fall it on Gonzalo.
[They draw]
SEBASTIAN O, but one word!

Of course, they are prevented by the good magic of Prospero

([Enter Ariel, invisible, with music and song]) from the double murder which would change the distant European order on an island in the middle of nowhere. Nevertheless, all the restless imaginative ambitions of Shakespeare's history and tragedy characters are bound up in this scene: the ambition of Macbeth, the ruthlessness of Richard III, the treachery of Iago, and the cruelty of Claudius are contained and controlled by the potent repentance-producing powers of Prospero.

The mimetic influence of Antonio's ambitions, which persuade others to act in the same way, repeat themselves in parody in the subplot, but with a touch of pathos. The reader sees the folly in Caliban's sudden exultation of the freedom he thinks he finds with his new master, the drunken butler Stephano.

> 'Ban, 'Ban, Ca-Caliban
> Has a new master: get a new man.
> Freedom, high days! high-day, freedom! freedom,
> high-day, freedom!
> (II.ii.179-82)

"Master" and "freedom" are incompatible terms. When Caliban picks a stock comic figure to worship as a God, he has no way to judge the easy-going, petty-thieving nature of this delightful character. In a comic way, Stephano learns a mimetic process from Caliban, who by exhibiting all the rules of respect and deference towards Stephano teaches Stephano the way he should act towards Caliban. Stephano is astute enough to imitate the manner which is expected of him, yet, like Trinculo the professional jester, he knows how unfit the three of them are to form a new kingdom:

> STEPHANO Servant monster drink to me.
> TRINCULO Servant monster? The folly of this
> island! They say there's but five upon this
> isle. If the other two be brained like us,
> the state totters.
> (III.ii.3-7)

Prospero has their measure. He puts "trumpery" out on the washing line, and distracts them from the conspiracy Stephano and Trinculo would most likely not have carried through anyway. We realize that the role of usurper is beyond their ambition, and we also remember the fuddling verbal drift and very active language-play which characterize Shakespeare's clown population and which rule out these two as genuine conspirators. Caliban is actually the most hard-bitten conspirator of the three. He has enough resentment and enough ambition to want another conspirator to act where he has failed because of Prospero's vigilance, and kill Prospero for him.

If Caliban learns any important lessons in his failed coup, the most important is the ability to judge who has real power. He gets to make his first comparative judgement of humans when he sees the rest of Alonzo's company at Caliban's cell, after his conspiracy is stopped.

> CALIBAN O Setebos, these be brave spirits indeed!
> How fine my master is! I'm afraid
> He will chastize me.
> (V.i.261-3)

And then he realizes that not all humans are God-like:

> I'll be wise hereafter,
> And seek for grace. What a thrice-double ass
> Was I to take this drunkard for a god
> And worship this dull fool!
> (V.i.299-6)

The hero-worship is over. Caliban's recognition is a kind of comic clarification, a reign of good sense after the Saturnalia of an attempted coup. By seeing how others regard Prospero, he can find better reasons to be in Prospero's good graces. There is hope for Caliban because Prospero's insistence on obedience is qualified and mitigated by the reformed hearts he searches for in all of his enemies. Caliban here learns his first lesson in polity. He will place his respect where respect is merited, not in every human who chances along. He begins to distinguish among the ranks of humans, which saves on wasted resentment and adoration among his colonizers.

The Tempest has sociological and political foresight, although some critics do not think of it as having to do with man's political behavior. Any ambitions on a desert island are absurd, yet that is the way human beings act when they are confronted with the *tabula rasa* of an uninhabited frontier. The marooned state of Antonio and Sebastian only serves to take away from them the civilized rules other men have internalized, and let their ambitions loose.

Critics concentrate on the allegorical and symbolic importance of the all-powerful magician Prospero, and they neglect the rest of the characters, who attempt to gain power in ordinary ways, the way most men would. Human behavior patterns are as visible as strata in an eroded rock formation to the alert reader. The full reconciliation which is extended to some, and the provisional reconciliation which is extended to the conspirators Antonio and Sebastian obscures the recognition that comedy extends through its full range in The Tempest, from the first comic treatment of the slaying of a man in Cain and Abel to the very highest ethical and spiritual development which Miranda represents.

Prospero's explanation of the shipwreck to his daughter is the culmination of all sympathetic observation and narrative compassion found in the earlier Shakespearean comedy. Miranda's anguish grows out of a long genealogy of witnessing narrators, from the Duke of Syracuse's pity for the hapless Egeon, to Bottom's awed inarticulateness about the mingling of two comic worlds, to the loving historical memory of the clown-gravediggers in Hamlet, to the benign non-interventionist forgiveness of Dogberry and his crew, and through the extraordinary mingling of comedy and catastrophe in the sympathetic narrative of the Shepherd's Son towards the double disaster he witnesses in The Winter's Tale. Yet more remarkable than all the other witnesses, here the helpless spectator appeals to her father's magic powers to correct the disaster she witnesses:

> MIRANDA If by your act, my dearest father, you have
> Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.
> The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking
> pitch

But that the sea, mounting to th' welkin's
                              cheek,
Dashes the fire out. O, I have suffered
With those I saw suffer! a brave vessel
(Who had no doubt some noble creature in her)
Dashed all to pieces! O, the cry did knock
Against my very heart! Poor souls, they
                        perished!
Had I been any god of power, I would
Have sunk the sea within the earth or ere
It should the good ship so have swallowed and
The fraughting souls within her.
                                (I.ii.1-13)

Prospero assures his daughter her helplessness will not last. This is the re-enactment of every parent comforting his child, but with the extraordinary proviso that Prospero can truly assure Miranda that what she witnessed did not happen:

PROSPERO   Be collected.
No more amazement. Tell your piteous heart
There's no harm done.
MIRANDA   O, woe the day!
PROSPERO   No harm.
I have done nothing but in care of thee,
Of thee my dear one, thee my daughter, who
Art ignorant of what thou art, naught knowing
Of whence I am; nor that I am more better
Than Prospero, master of a full poor cell,
And thy no greater father.
MIRANDA   More to know
Did never meddle with my thoughts.
PROSPERO   'Tis time
I should inform thee farther. Lend thy hand
And pluck my magic garment from me. So,
Lie there, my art. Wipe thou thine eyes; have
                                  comfort.
The direful spectacle of the wreck, which
                              touched
The very virtue of compassion in thee,
I have with provision in mine art
So safely ordered that there is no soul--
No, not so much perdition as an hair
Betid to any creature in the vessel

Which thou heard'st cry, which thou saw'st
sink. Sit down;
For thou must now know farther.
(I.ii.1-33)

The dialogue is extraordinary in that it becomes a fusion of New Testament sentiments with dramatic speech. There are echoes from The New Testament throughout. It is significant that shipwreck occasions the dialogue between Prospero and Miranda, because shipwreck occurs in a number of Shakespeare's plays, beginning with The Comedy of Errors, and including The Merchant of Venice, Twelfth Night, and all of the Romances but Cymbeline. Narrations of shipwrecks in the early and middle Comedies change to actual shipwreck episodes in The Winter's Tale and The Tempest.

Shakespearean comedy echoes so many of St. Paul's words that it would not be surprising if Shakespeare had St. Paul's shipwreck in mind when he wrote this play. Richmond Noble lists one New Testament allusion from the shipwreck of St. Paul: "for there shal not an heare of the head perish of any of you," from Acts 27:34.[2] Prospero's reassurance to his daughter that all the ship's passengers are safe echoes Matthew 10:29-31, where Jesus makes the reassurance that all the hairs of our heads are numbered. Miranda's "'O, I have suffered/ With those I saw suffer!" alludes to many of St. Paul's definitions of love, including I Corinthians 12, where Paul develops the metaphor of the Christian community as a body with its members, culminating with Verse 26: "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it. . . . " Miranda's exclamation "O, the cry did knock/ Against my very heart" echoes Luke 11:9-10, where Jesus answers a disciple's request to be taught how to pray: Jesus says that earnest entreaty will gain the Father's attention: "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you." The passage implies divine love on Miranda's part towards the suffering victims of the shipwreck.

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[2] Richmond Noble, Shakespeare's Biblical Knowledge, London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, p. 249.

A minor cognitio is established with Prospero's decision after Miranda's plea to tell his daughter who she is and where she comes from. What Miranda learns re-establishes the context of the Romance structure, because family and family loyalties are what tie the plots of each Romance together. This resembles I Corinthians 33, "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." St. Paul also tells his church at Corinth that without eternal life the professed faith of Christianity is meaningless:

> If after the manner of men I have fought
> with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me,
> if the dead rise not? Let us eat and drink;
> for tomorrow we die.
> Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt
> good manners.
> (I Corinthians 15:32-33)

The New Testament underscores the importance of fostering hope and the sturdy faith of the spirit in its congregations, which tells us how important it is for Prospero to calm his daughter and drive away the terror of what she has seen. Prospero sees a full measure of courage in his daughter's compassion, but like St. Paul he knows that bravery means nothing without hope, even in gladiatorial combats. Prospero gives his daughter hope by his assurance that he commands the elements and that the storm she saw was an illusion.

Miranda's spiritual importance is established early in the play. The enduring influence of New Testament allusions in the first Act means Miranda represents more than most comic heroines. She represents the eternal vitalizing force of love, a quality she shares abundantly with her Romance counterparts.[3]

The father-daughter relationship in The Tempest has virtually no "blocks" to Miranda's marriage with Ferdinand (dependant on their falling in love with each other), a comic certainty which will ensure that Miranda's feminine and divine compassion will be born into future generations. Shakespeare's use of the senex in the last of his comedies implies that he was finished, or nearly finished, with the convention. Since this comedy has little to do with the ordinary kinds of blocking characters, and more to do with the problem of ambition itself, Shakespeare can use the senex to suggest the earlier forms of comic convention he already exploited. The Tempest needs the marriage of Miranda and Ferdinand, but is primarily concerned with other problems, problems of ambition which occur in all Shakespeare's dramatic genres, so Shakespeare uses the senex to get his play past what is the "middle" of romantic complications in earlier comedies to develop his real concerns in this "metacomedy."

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[3] Alfred Harbage says: "in every case the daughter evokes in our minds the figure of the vernal maiden, symbol of eternal renewal." Harbage, ed. The Complete Pelican Shakespeare, p. 1257. Juliet Dusinberre gives us an explanation of love as the cornerstone of the Puritan marriage, which influences Shakespeare's conception of marriage in all of his drama. Juliet Dusinberre, Shakespeare and the Nature of Women, passim.

Comparison of Greek Old Comedy with Shakespearean comedy is always tenuous, but The Tempest does seem Aristophanic, more so than any other Shakespearean comedy, because Prospero creates his own kingdom of magic on the isle, similar to the fantasy worlds the protagonists of Aristophanic comedies build for themselves. The fantasy fortresses of The Birds and Peace, for example, establish a personal world according to certain comic conditions, and then defend it from all attempts by the outside world to corrupt or destroy it.

> In Aristophanes there is usually a central figure who constructs his (or her) own society in the teeth of strong opposition, driving off one after another all the people who come to prevent or exploit him, and eventually achieving

> a heroic triumph, complete with mistresses, in
> which he is sometimes assigned the honors of
> a reborn god.[4]

Shakespeare's Romances are slightly closer to Greek Old Comedy than the rest of Shakespeare's comedies, but Frye's definition of an Aristophanic structure shows us how profoundly different are the Romances from the usual Elizabethan comedy. Aristophanes himself was considered a political conservative.[5] His comedies, however, are ribald, satiric, uproarious and sometimes desperate political solutions to the grinding war with Sparta, the tyranny of Cleon, and the fraying of the Athenian social fabric under these conditions.

Shakespeare, on the other hand, wrote most of his comedies during a period of English military ascendancy, and then during the Jacobean darkness of 1603 onwards, when relations between king and country were very low during the reign of King James I. Most of the hopes of the Protestant and militaristic and chivalric factions were placed in King James' eldest son, Prince Henry, who admired aggressive colonizers like Raleigh and the Earl of Southampton.[6] Ferdinand may represent England's hopes for Prince Henry, and The Tempest might not have been written to celebrate the marriage of Elizabeth, Henry's sister, to Frederick, the Elector of Palatine in 1613, but instead to celebrate the virtues lost with Henry's early death in 1612.

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[4] Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 43.

[5] Alan H. Sommerstein, trans. Aristophanes: The Acharnians, The Clouds, Lysistrata. Suffolk: The Chaucer Press Ltd., 1984, p. 15.

[6] Roy Strong, Henry Prince of Wales and England's Lost Renaissance, London: Thames and Hudson, 1986, pp. 7-86.

However, Shakespeare did not write radical political fantasies, but rather romantic comedies; the political motives driving Aristophanes' imagination created a far different cast of characters. The difference is most marked with the female characters. Shakespeare's women are genuine heroines, while Aristophanes' female characters are either mute saviors, as in the case of Harvest and Festival, Peace's beautiful companions, in Peace and Peace herself, or they are mute rewards for the hero, like Sovereignty in The Birds. Shakespearean heroines have a far more active role in determining the outcome of their comedies.

Shakespeare's heroines are scarcely mute. As an example, Rosalind's lines in As You Like It are the central and focussing concern in her comedy. Rosalind largely determines who ends up with whom, and what attitude most of the lovers in the play should adopt towards their lovers and towards love itself. Miranda's role in The Tempest, even though it is not the predominant one, expresses the compassionate care for others that forms the ethical and religious base by which Prospero tests and reforms the hearts of other men. Miranda, like Marina before her, is her father's daughter, but surely Prospero shows the leniency and forgiveness he does to his enemies because of Miranda's active concern for the victims of the shipwreck. She is not an allegorical figure; The Tempest does not lend itself to allegory, but she does represent in Shakespeare's last comedy the major ethical concerns of all the rest of his comedies.

Ferdinand's good manners speak well for Alonzo's upbringing, and his willingness to listen to and obey his future father-in-law reveals something of the redeemable nature of Alonzo. What seems to unfold in the course of the play from Act II onwards is a concentration on the ambitious selfishness of the dangerous characters (Antonio and Sebastian), set in opposition to the self-sacrificing loyalties of the "good" characters. Yet all of them play out their parts within the enclosing web of Prospero's contrition-producing magic.

As a romantic lead, Ferdinand is far less surly than Leontes or Posthumus, perhaps because he harks back to the more or less standard hero of Shakespeare's middle comedies.

> The technical hero and heroine are not often very interesting people: the adulescentes of Plautus and Terence are all alike, as hard to tell apart in the dark as Demetrius and Lysander, who may be parodies of them. Generally the hero's character has the neutrality that enables him to represent a wish-fulfillment.[7]

Frye's definition is not entirely true of Ferdinand. Besides being a proper young man who speaks all the correct sentiments, Ferdinand treats his future father-in-law with respect after he understands who he is, and he instantly adores Miranda. Perhaps because so much depends on this marriage to Miranda, he seems more than the neutral wish-fulfillment the hero in other comedies represents. His love for Miranda heals a rift of twelve bitter years between two rulers, one of them deposed, who are fundamentally decent men, and in the comic world are the permanent non-magical means to controlling dangerous ambition in a civilized society. Ferdinand is one half of a politically desirable match, and unlike James's Prince Henry, a non-threatening heir to the throne his father occupies. He is also more a romantic lead than a political sacrifice to a father's political ambitions through the marriage of his children because he falls in love on his own, and through his own initiative gives Prospero a diplomatic triumph which Prospero can utilize to dispel Alonzo's purgatorial belief that his son has drowned.

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[7] Frye, Anatomy of Criticism. p. 167.

Shakespeare has built this play's comedy structure on a romantic core much like the middle "happy" comedies, yet in The Tempest the young lovers operate in a sphere of hope realized, not in a New Comedy plot of parental opposition which must be overcome. One forgets a detail that is obscured, but dovetails beautifully with the ending of The Tempest: all the strangers and inhabitants of the island when collected together form a new wedding party out of the returning wedding party from Tunis. Claribel's wedding takes on a particular significance: her marriage has taken place over the line of the horizon, which the shipwrecked inhabitants must see on all sides of the island, so that Claribel begins to represent the emptiness of sea and sky which makes the pragmatist and the Machiavel alike underestimate hope. His daughter has been left too far away from Alonzo for him to think he will ever see her again, and _so_ far away that the conspirators Antonio and Sebastian leap to the conclusion that the sweetness of an earthly crown is theirs for the taking:

> She that is Queen of Tunis; she that dwells
> Ten leagues beyond man's life; she that from Naples
> Can have no note, unless the sun were post.
> The man i' th' moon's too slow--till new-born chins
> Be rough and razorable; she that from whom
> We all were sea-swallowed, though soon cast again.
> (II.ii.240-5)

For twelve years Prospero planned in hope for his daughter's future, until providence cast up the returning wedding party on his desert isle. Claribel's wedding to the king of Tunis, which she reluctantly agreed to, becomes the providential means by which Prospero can finally confront his enemies with their injustices to him. Once again, in the last of Shakespeare's Romances, and in a way which goes unnoticed, a woman becomes the way of redemption for erring men. Even though Claribel is too far away ever to know she has been an instrument of her father's belated recognition of the injustices he has committed in the past, the baton of spiritual regeneration passes from the unseen daughter of Alonzo, who has perhaps been martyred to an undesired royal wedding, to the radiant daughter filled with new wonder and hope towards the world, Prospero's Miranda.

Both daughters have a hand in the reconciliation of their fathers, and thus in a restored and rightful peace between two Italian Renaissance cities. Ironically, but characteristically, neither one is aware of her role. The effect of this providential timing is to make The Tempest profoundly a Romance, a play in which unseen and unacknowledged forces mysteriously work for good, and as much a Romance as any Romance can be in the Shakespearean genre. In the other three Romances the "active" good of the heroines is more apparent. Shakespeare leaves implicit in The Tempest what becomes so wonderfully explicit in the heroines in the other Romances, as if he meant his final comedy to become the blueprint of all Romance structure, without recourse to some of the more spectacular dramatic mechanisms.

The Tempest is the profoundest of Shakespeare's comedies, possessing in seed form most of the comic antagonists we encounter in the rest of the comedies, yet they are comic antagonists who do not hinder Miranda's life choices. The history and tragedy genres of usurpation and murder, the comic genre of love and reconciling marriage, and the romance genre of humbling and destroyed illusions are all played out nearly simultaneously on separate parts of the island. Thus Shakespeare has moved from the easily outmaneuvered blocking characters of his early comedies, to the serious comic threats of the comic antagonists of his slightly later and middle comedies, through the unreconciled viewpoints of his problem comedies, to the ultimately reconciled viewpoints of his Romances. He separates all his genres and re-establishes them on a desert island for a final scrutiny by Prospero and Prospero's audience.

The final approval of the comedy solution of love and marriage is given to Miranda. Because Miranda is innocent and unaware of the ways of the world, it seems fair that she is not blocked by any of the comic antagonists in her comedy, and remains unaware of them after she has followed the promptings of her heart in choosing a husband. While she is not buffeted by misfortune, as her Romance counterparts were (Marina, Imogen, Hermione and Perdita), because her misfortunes are in the dimly remembered past, like other comic heroines she transforms all misfortune into good fortune. Her effect on her father Prospero is obvious.

The dangerous part of The Tempest, the ruthless and not-so-ruthless plans of various conspirators, changes this play's "middle" (love and marriage are solved by the end of Act II) from the dramatic middle of the other three Romances. Quick, shifting, and highly dramatic misfortunes are replaced with hints and allusions, procreative intuitions of creating impulses gone wrong (that is, gone over to the side of ambition), so this play, like its tragic counterpart Antony and Cleopatra, ultimately dwells on the constructions of love rather than the constructions of ambition.

The romantic core found in all the rest of Shakespeare's comedies is kept intact in The Tempest, and the comic antagonists are also kept, but allowed to play out their ambitions in more concentrated form as conspirators. Rather than being subjected to an earlier form of comic justice, the conspirators (including Caliban) are tested and reluctantly accepted into the marriage celebration at the end of the play. Ambition, which characterizes most comic antagonists in one form or another, is seen in its purest form in The Tempest. What is accommodated in other comedies, or ultimately rejected, is subjected to intense scrutiny and taken on sufferance when comic antagonism gives way to that which motivates the antagonism, ambition itself.

Like its tragic counterpart Antony and Cleopatra, The Tempest dreams an ambition of love in man's waking world of daylight ambition, and dreams this dream in spite of the Ecclesiastical recognition that all life is rounded by a sleep at either end. The vanity of man's actions, which is a submerged part of tragic recognition, a non-existent or reluctant recognition of ambitious characters in the history plays, and often an ethereal recognition in Shakespeare's comedies, finds its penultimate expression in The Tempest. The expression of Ecclesiastical wonder in Henry VIII is both stronger and more strange, but never more beautifully expressed than it is here.

The Tempest does not end with the resplendent visions of Antony and Cleopatra in tragedy, or The Winter's Tale in comedy, but instead with the completing of an active hope of forgiveness at work in the coil of the waking world, which makes its promise representatively and comprehensively comic. Gonzalo, the "honest old councillor," sums up the action of The Tempest best when he says that all the characters find themselves at the end of the play, "all of us ourselves/ When no man was his own" (V.i.212-113).[8] What the inhabitants of the desert island find is a hope for forgiveness, which is a return to the normal expectations of the comic world, and every man's due. The speech echoes the Biblical paradox that whosoever shall lose his life shall find it, which is a part of the hope comedy places on trust with the ordinary expectations the life of comedy represents.

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[8] I am indebted to Professor James Forrest, The University of Alberta, for recognizing the significance of the character of Gonzalo to the ethical concerns of The Tempest.

VIII. Tragedy and the Comic Matrix: Comedy and the Feminine in the Tragedies

The comedy matrix also appears in the world opposite to comedy in Shakespeare's major tragedies. There the term "comic antagonist" presents its obverse side, and the term "tragic protagonist" appears. As readers we are quite aware of what this term means, and we are also aware of the importance of tragic protagonists to tragedy. What we are not so aware of, however, is the comedy matrix which is inseparably part of the background of Shakespearean tragedy. The comedy matrix allies itself with the feminine sensibility in the major tragedies, chiefly with the most important female characters, and represents a force which opposes itself to, and in some cases actually subverts the concentration and single-minded purpose of the tragic protagonists.

Comedy and the components of comedy are present in all five of the "major tragedies," and the influence of comedy in them ranges from the active ruin Cleopatra's feminine sensibility brings to Antony, to a background of fertility and peace Macbeth's crimes violate, to the highly ironic mixing of comic situation with tragic commitment in Hamlet. In some ways hard to define, Hamlet is the most sophisticated compound of the comic and the tragic that the Renaissance stage presents to us. The more we know about comedy, the more relevant comic theory becomes to this highly puzzling play, which is rich in comic suggestion and comic episodes, but which, of course, as a tragedy misses being a comedy. That is one of Hamlet's puzzling characteristics: as profound a tragedy as it is, the more we know about it, the closer to comedy it seems in intent, structure, and even in much of its atmosphere. Hamlet's catastrophe catches him up so quickly, and we are so well prepared for it emotionally, that there is nothing to complain about from a comic viewpoint. Nevertheless, something persistently comic lingers, as if Shakespeare meant to nag at comic theorists the same way Hamlet nags at, and will continue to nag at generations of metaphysicians with its suggestiveness.[1]

This chapter ends with Hamlet, in violation of chronological order, because Hamlet, it seems to me, is the highest achievement of Shakespeare's creation of tragedy out of the comedy matrix. If the four Romances, including the only play not published in the First Folio (1623), Pericles, are added to the original canon of twelve comedies,[2] we have sixteen comedies in all, a little less than half of the original number included in the first major printing of Shakespeare's plays. These tragedies, however, do not include everything in the Shakespearean canon which can be considered comic, at least not according to Samuel Johnson, who said in his "Preface to Shakespeare":

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[1] Jean MacIntyre, "Hamlet and the Comic Heroine," Hamlet Studies, 1982, Summer-Winter, 4(1-2), pp. 6-18.

[2] David Bevington, ed., The Complete Works of Shakespeare. Glenville: Scott Fresman and Company, 1980, p. 1611.

> Shakespeare's plays are not in the rigorous and critical sense either tragedies or comedies, but compositions of a distinct kind: exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination; and expressing the course of the world, in which the loss of one is the gain of the other; in which, at the same time, the reveller is hastening to his wine, and the mourner burying his friend; in which the malignity of one is sometimes defeated by the frolic of another; and many mischiefs are done and hindered without design.[3]

Polonius is the voice which speaks for all genres in Shakespeare when he describes the dramatic range of the travelling troupe of actors in Hamlet II.ii: "the best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical, historical-pastoral; scene individable or poem unlimited" (II.ii.386-91). Yet Polonius himself tragically mixes ambition for his daughter with the business of state, exhibiting a lack of distinction between tragedy and comedy which proves fatal for him. We are forewarned by his tragic muddling of literary classifications that a clear distinction between the serious issues of tragedy and the frivolous issues of comedy is necessary for survival, at least in a tragic context. Nevertheless, "poem unlimited" might be the best working definition available for classifying Shakespeare's plays.

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[3] Arthur Sherbo, ed., Johnson on Shakespeare, The Yale Edition of The Works of Samuel Johnson, Vol. 7, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968, p. 66.

According to Johnson, Shakespeare

> indulged his natural disposition, and his natural disposition, as Rhymer remarked, led him to comedy. In tragedy he often writes with great appearance of toil and study, what is written at last with little felicity; but in his comic scenes, he seems to produce without labor, what no labor can improve. In tragedy he is always struggling after some occasion to be comic, but in comedy he seems to repose, or to luxuriate, as in a mode of thinking congenial to his nature.[4]

We may not agree that Shakespeare's tragedies were written "with little felicity," but we might agree with the assertion that Shakespeare worked in a comic matrix to produce all his dramatic genres. The "poem unlimited" crosses the boundaries of comedy, history, tragedy and romance, and appears as a pervasive force in the tragic commitment of tragic characters, the political consistency or inconsistency of political characters, and the busy concerns of comic characters.

"Poem unlimited" means the comedy matrix, identified by Susan Snyder in her important study of the presence of a comedy background in the tragedies, The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies.[5] Only in the "romances" does the influence of the comedy matrix diminish; Pericles (c.1607), Cymbeline (c. 1608 or earlier), The Winter's Tale (c. 1610), and The Tempest (1610-11) shift the perspective away from the festival and marriage endings, as Northrop Frye calls them, to endings of penance, forgiveness and reconciliation.[6] The romances share a particular feature with the tragedies, one which is perhaps a truism, but worth consideration: in all except Hamlet, marriage is an accomplished fact for the major characters, even if the marriage has taken place only a short time before the play begins, as it has in Cymbeline and Othello. Forgiveness and reconciliation take place at the end of the tragedies too, yet the difference which marks off the comedy matrix in the tragedies from the romances is the final impression left with the audience; in the romances the comedy structure contains and redeems the tragedy which threatens it, and in the tragedies the catastrophe highlights the comedy structure. That is, it does when we look at tragedy from a comic perspective.

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[4] Johnson, p. 6.

[5] Susan Snyder, The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies: Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, Othello, and King Lear. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. Introduction and throughout.

Pericles and Cymbeline rely on the working of an outside fate, represented by natural disasters and human evil, to complicate their plots, but The Winter's Tale and The Tempest deal with evil self-generated and overcome by the protagonists themselves. What John Fletcher said about his own romance, The Faithful Shepherdess, applies to the plot of several of Shakespeare's early and middle comedies and all of his romances: it "wants deaths, which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet brings some near it, which is enough to make it no comedy."[7]

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[6] Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, Four Essays. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957, pp. 163-4.

The romances are the plays in which the appearance of comedy and tragedy characteristics is most obvious. Nevertheless, the comedy matrix is the background for both "tragedy" and "comedy" in Shakespeare. Tragic commitment can be defined by its relationship to comedy assumptions, and comedy can be defined by its relationship to its own assumptions, but the reverse does not hold true; comedy commitment cannot be defined by the assumptions of tragedy even if we accept the premise that tragedy and comedy both take form from a comic matrix.

The "poem unlimited" appears everywhere in Shakespeare's plays, and is the stuff of ordinary life. Johnson tells us ". . . [Shakespeare] has been able to obtain an exact knowledge of many modes of life. . .Nor was his attention confined to the actions of men; he was an exact surveyor of the inanimate world."[8] The "poem unlimited" includes the comic subplots in all Shakespeare's plays, but also includes more than that. For example, sturdy self-interest and a lack of tragic commitment, along with a love of puns and wordplay, characterize Shakespeare's self-respecting subplot characters, but the comic matrix also includes comic villains like Malvolio and Shylock, and tragic characters and situations, including the protagonists, of Shakespeare's four major tragedies, Hamlet (c.1599-1601), Othello (c. 1603-4), King Lear (c. 1605), and Macbeth (cc.1606-7).[9]

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[7] Harbage, ed. "Forword," The Complete Pelican Shakespeare. New York: The Viking Press, 1975, p. 1257.

[8] Johnson, p.89.

Tragedy makes comedy possible. It negates comic reconciliation by the commitment of tragic characters to a single course of action, thereby showing what the limits of comedy reconciliation may be. We only have to check an uneducated knowledge of the distinction between tragedy and comedy to know that tragedy demands commitments on the part of its protagonists which put them beyond comedy. Tragic action is irreconcilable. Tragedy characters place themselves beyond comedy, but the reverse does not hold true.

If we may follow Polonius' lead again, the two terms which become a useful distinction in comedy and tragedy are the terms "tragic protagonist" and "comic antagonist." Both live in imminent danger of exiting from the comedy matrix of their dramatic worlds forever:

> The tendency of comedy is to include as many people as possible in the final society; the blocking characters are more often reconciled or converted than simply repudiated. Comedy often includes a scapegoat ritual of expulsion which gets rid of some irreconcilable character, but exposure and disgrace make for pathos, or even tragedy.[10]

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[9] Bevington, pp. 1622-1624.

[10] Frye, p. 165.

Expulsion is not precisely what happens in tragedy, because tragic commitment always leaves behind values which approach the impersonal and the universal, although St. Augustine's Confessions give us at least a hint of a man who achieved the universal and the eternal in a profoundly comic commitment.[11] Comic expulsion is not tragic commitment and death, which fixes the tragic protagonist's values eternally.

There are immortal comedy deaths, too, but they stay in the framework of comedy, which traditionally treats death with a light touch. "Poem unlimited" is the literary classification which clearly describes Falstaff's death. Mistress Quickly's description of his death may be an unconscious parody of Plato's description of the death of Socrates, who died the world's saddest and most unnecessary imposed death. Mistress Quickly repeats in bawdy and irreverent form Socrates' death in her description of Falstaff's death:

> . . .'A made a finer end, and went away an it been any christom child. 'A parted ev'n just between twelve and one, ev'n at the turning o' th' tide. For after I saw him fumble with the sheets, and play with flowers, and smile upon his fingers end, I knew there was but one way; for his nose was as sharp as a pen, and 'a talk't of green fields. 'How now, Sir John?' quoth I.'What, man? be o' good cheer.' So 'a cried out 'God, God, God!' three or four times. Now I, to comfort him bid him 'a should not think of God; I hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thought yet. So 'a bade me lay more clothes on

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[11] St. Augustine, The Confessions of Augustine, New York: Garland Publ, 1980.

> his feet. I put my hand into the bed and felt them, and they were as cold as any stone. Then I felt to his knees, and so upward and upward, and all was as cold as any stone.
>
> (II.ii. 10-24)

Falstaff exits like a natural force, on the clock of the turning tide, which seems appropriate for a character who thought of himself as Diana's forester. Harbage points out the allusion to the Twenty-third Psalm in Mistress Quickley's "a talk't of green fields," and the hint of a metaphor exists in the description of Falstaff's nose, the hint that Falstaff serves a satirical function in the midst of the political solemnities of the Henry IV and Henry V plays.[12]

Comedy can be relentless--Mistress Quickley stays in character, continuing to be her self-interested self when Nym asks for more information concerning Falstaff's death. She holds back the telling of some of it until prompted to tell the whole truth by Falstaff's boy:

> NYM They say he cried out of sack.
> HOSTESS Ay that 'a did.
> BARDOLPH And of women.
> HOSTESS Nay, that 'a did not.
> BOY Yes, that 'a did, and said they were devils incarnate.
>
> (II.iii.25-9)

Where the reader might expect the truth, and a man's last words would seem to deserve it, Mistress Quickley lies about Falstaff's repentance and tries to maintain the illusion that he has only lost part of his faith. She will not go against her own interests as hostess and bawd, and admit that Falstaff has made a complete last-minute repentance of his prodigal life. Because she is part of the "poem unlimited," part of the obtuse, language-mangling context of many of Shakespeare's subplot characters, and part of the life of everyday interests and concerns found everywhere in Shakespeare's writing, including the tragedies, Mistress Quickley stays in character as a hostess who remains optimistic about everything that concerns her; she tries to keep together in her narration the family made up of Falstaff, Doll Tearsheet, and Falstaff's followers.

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[12] Harbage, p. 754.

Her attempt to keep the "family" together with her well-meaning omissions in the description of Falstaff's death points up the spirit of comedy she embodies: comedy's tendency to include everybody, and to immortalize in language the spirit of festivity Falstaff represents in his less reprehensible moments. Frye tells us that Renaissance comedy plots follow the Roman models provided in the comedies of Plautus and Terence:

> At the beginning of the play the obstructing characters are in charge of the play's society, and the audience recognizes they are usurpers. At the end of the play the device in the plot that brings hero and heroine together causes a new society to crystallize around the hero.[13]

"Crystallize" is a verb which describes how a new society forms at the end of Shakespearean comedy, although Frye's definition of comedy plot works best in describing the Early and the Middle Comedies. We might re-define that process to cover all of Shakespeare's drama by making a more general statement: comedy re-affirms the naturalness of the original society, a process which becomes more apparent in The Winter's Tale. The transformation of Hermione from the rigidity of art to the naturalness of a living woman takes place only because the comic context of the first half of the play, which is the world run by the comic antagonists, has prepared the way. The birth of Perdita and the cloistering and reappearance of Hermione lead eventually to the antithesis of an art object being created out of desire, which the Pygmalion and Galatea myth represents, and which may have been a source for the play. When Hermione comes back to the world, she comes back in an unbroken continuity of life. Even as a statue she shows the marks of time, which is a negation of one kind of immortality in art. When she recognizes her husband and blesses her grownup daughter (whom she sees for the first time, and who is kneeling and gazing at her), she offers us proof that she exists as a continuity between the comedy matrix of the first half of the play and the second half.

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[13] Frye, p. 163.

Frye describes the basic comedy plot accurately and comprehensively enough: the variations and complications show up immediately in what may be Shakespeare's first comedy, The Comedy of Errors.[14] This play follows the plot of Plautus's Maneachmi closely, and plays on stage as farce. In a general way it comes as close to romance as it does to comedy with its shipwrecks, divided families, search for identity, and "cognitio" at the end of the play. It frames the comic action with a threat of death at the beginning of the play and release from that threat to Egeon at the end of the play. The comic resolution grows out of the misunderstandings between the comedy matrix of the play and the "strangers" who do not accept the Ephesian world they are presented with. Shakespeare doubles Plautus's set of identical twins and also widens the comedy context of domestic and community life: both subplot characters and main plot characters are caught up in the ensuing confusions. Dromio and Antipholus of Syracuse find life bewilderingly welcoming to them in Ephesus, and the multiplying confusions of mistaken identities constantly refute the alienation of Syracusan master and servant by insistently handing them an identity they do not recognize. The complications are resolved in Act V, when both sets of twins finally meet in the middle of the stage.

Drama as a mimetic action lets actors live a false identity while they are on stage, a fact Hamlet is self-laceratingly aware of:

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[14] Paul Jorgenson, "The Comedy of Errors: Introduction," The Complete Pelican Shakespeare, pp. 55-6.

> O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
> Is it not monstrous that this player here,
> But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
> Could force his soul so to his own conceit
> That from her working all his visage wanned,
> Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,
> A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
> With forms to his conceit?
> (II.ii. 534-41)

Dromio and Antipholus of Syracuse "act" badly before their true identities are discovered, just as do Dromio and Antipholus of Ephesus; the comic context, however, does not include masters and servants only--Egeon and the Abbess create the middle ground of comedy which correctly provides an identity extending to both sets of twins; they are the comedy matrix which includes Ephesus and Syracuse in a common identity and common bond.

In this early comedy the plot removes all the obstacles, but Shakespeare's early dependence on a Roman form of plotting provides a hint of what will come in *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. In *The Comedy of Errors*, plot obstacles disappear with the denouement. Shakespeare stays within the unity of time; the play takes place in less than a day,[15] yet it is characteristic of Shakespeare's comedy matrix that he introduces into it images of birth, and the number of years (33) which recall the length of Christ's life:

> Renowned Duke, vouchsafe to take the pains
> To go with us into the abbey here,

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[15] T.S. Dorsch, trans., *Classical Literary Criticism*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1981, p. 38.

> And hear at large discoursed all our fortunes;
> And all that are assembled in this place,
> That by this sympathized one day's error
> Have suffered wrong, go keep us company,
> And we shall make full satisfaction.
> Thirty-three years have I but gone in travail
> Of you, my sons; and till this present hour
> My heavy burden ne'er delivered.
> The Duke, my husband, and my children both,
> And you the calendars of their nativity,
> Go to a gossip's feast, and go with me;
> After so long grief such Nativity!
> (V.i.395-408)

The Abbess seems to be speaking partly for the assembled characters at the end of the comedy, and partly to the audience. The bewildered characters who reveal to the Abbess the "calendars" of her sons' nativity presumably are those who have grown up with her sons, and helped to establish the context of the lives of Dromio and Antipholus of Ephesus. We find a similar comic matrix in Cassius's demythologizing, critical memory of Caesar's human fallibility--Cassius remembers Caesar nearly drowned when they were swimming across the Tiber, and Cassius had to save him, and shaking with fever on a military campain in Spain. Cassius' memory of Caesar when he was a younger man establishes a strong "comedy matrix" against a divine emperor: all the principal characters in Rome grew up together, and are too human to be thought of as divine.

The Abbess figuratively "delays" her pregnancy until her sons can be found and "born" again. The , reborn to her, their birth can be celebrated by a christening "feast" with "gossips" (godparents) present. The religious connotations of the word "Nativity" fit in with the epiphanal associations of the Nativity described in Luke 2:1-21, which also begins a new society and a new age with the birth of the infant Jesus.

Here, Christian allusions exist comfortably with a Roman comic source; Shakespeare has gone beyond the dimension of farce to set out in sketch or outline form what will be revealed more spectacularly in the statue scene in The Winter's Tale. New birth ensures reconciliation between Leontes and the sensible comedy world he disowns in his madness. Hermione represents a transformation of art into life, a kind of communal resurrection which takes place between the witnesses and the art form, which will pass from a static state into the living context of comedy.

The Shepherd's son in The Winter's Tale represents Shakespeare's "poem unlimited," or continuous comic sequence of life, co-existing with self-generating evil. The abbess's speech in The Comedy of Errors anticipates the living and dying worlds which become the consequence of Leontes' sin of pride towards his own innocence and the regenerative forces of nature which rescue most of the consequences of his madness.[16] It also anticipates the active catastrophe the Shepherd's son witnesses on land and at sea, and on both sides of his vision; sailors and passengers perishing in a shipwreck off the seacoast and a man being torn apart and devoured by a bear on the land.

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[16] Robert N. Watson, Shakespeare and the Hazards of Ambition, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1984.

The clown's helpless and powerless sympathy is evenly balanced between the agonies on sea and land, yet there is nothing he can do. Seldom does Shakespeare place his clown population in a situation drawing on so many sympathies at once. The Winter's Tale presents a scene where tragedy and comedy meet, or "tragical" comedy and comedy meet; Polonius' mingling of genres takes place here, and marks the place where tragedy begins to give way to the "poem unlimited" of comedy. We can add to this scene the background of the Parable of the Lost Sheep--a search for lost sheep has brought the Shepherd and his son to the sea coast where they find Perdita; as the "lost sheep" found, she leads to the comic resolution of a potentially tragic dilemma. She knits the two halves of the play together.

Tragedy and comedy are evenly balanced in Shakespeare's last two romances. However, the comedy context exists in all of Shakespeare's plays, and we can understand Shakespeare's comic antagonists better if we understand how his tragic protagonists illuminate the comedy matrix in tragedy. In order to see that, the tragedies must be looked at from a comedy perspective; that is, from the perspective of continuing life rather than the perspective of tragic commitment and death.

We can make the adjustment to a comedy perspective if we look for a moment at a parallel scene in Hamlet, in which the living and the dying meet at the graveyard. This scene gives us another extraordinary situation where, for the first time, Hamlet's excoriating and obsessive concern with death becomes insulated by the grave-digger's comic acknowledgement of a tanner's hide's durability, a synecdoche of the durability of life itself. As G. Wilson Knight acknowledges,[17] Hamlet has become the "dyer's hand" of Sonnet 111, imbued with the consciousness of death's levelling effect; it takes the sturdy, self-interested, "technical" language of the clown's work experience, along with the word-play characteristic of all Shakespeare's clowns, to balance temporarily the forces of life and death. The clown tells Hamlet that a tanner will last an extra year in the ground, and he also knows what "every fool can tell"--"when the prince Hamlet was born":

> HAMLET . . .How long hast thou been a grave-maker?
> CLOWN Of all the days i'th'year, I came to't that day that our last king Hamlet overcame Fortinbras.
> HAMLET How long is that since?
> CLOWN Cannot you tell that? Every fool can tell that. It was the very day that young Hamlet was born--he that is mad and sent into England.
>
> (V.i.132-9)

The scene tells a lot about seeing tragedy from a comedy perspective. The grave-digger's talk gives a welcome implication that the common people still love the prince and, more important, still regard him as the legitimate heir to the throne, a fact well known to Claudius, who has had to maneuver carefully to have Hamlet put out of the way. Hamlet discovers he is speaking to a loyal citizen of the older legitimate order, now so ominously changed. Yet, like the spectator-clown in The Winter's Tale, the grave-digger cannot change the course of the play. The grave-digger is balanced between the same forces of life and death the Shepherd speaks of: "things dying. . . [and] things new-born." The difference is that Hamlet himself has met the ghost of Hamlet Senior, and has therefore met with death, while the grave-digger, at least in his historical memory, has met with "things new-born" and kept the memory of life and new beginnings alive in memory. If the boundaries of time dissolve in this scene which brings all time together in the graveyard where all separate tracks of time eventually meet, in the graveyard, then Shakespeare's "poem unlimited" has made itself apparent again, and tragic and comic genres mingle.

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[17] G. Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire, London: Methuen, 1983, pp. 17-46.

Does Polonius really speak for Shakespeare? Does he serve as a literary critic who sets out all of the genres Shakespeare has written or will write, and forewarn of the blending of genres that will classify all of Shakespeare's dramatic art? Probably, but I do not know for sure, no more than I know that Shakespeare's clowns and fools know that they flourish in both comic and tragic environments and in every other genre which exists between these two literary poles. The clowns and fools seem the most obvious representatives of that diurnal, living drift, that "fatal Cleopatra" of puns and word-play that Samuel Johnson deplored in Shakespeare's serious dramas.[18]

They are as omnipresent as the weeds and wild flowers which bedeck Lear in Act IV of King Lear when he is wandering and lost in the "high grown" field.

> Why, he was met even now
> As mad as the vexed sea, singing aloud,
> Crowned with rank fumiter and furrow weeds,
> With hardocks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo flow'rs
> Darnel, and all the idle weeds that grow
> In our sustaining corn. A century send forth!
> Search every acre in the high-grown field
> And bring him to our eye.
> (IV.iv. 1-8)

Truly, Lear is a pitiable sight, but he has also learned pity, and the common field flowers and weeds which crown him in such a startling glory serve as a visual metaphor for the "care" Lear has learned to take for the houseless and unfed of his kingdom. It is his youngest daughter who finally expresses pity for him, but by this time Lear has learned, or is learning, to care for those who really suffer from the proud world's neglect: those who are nameless and do not appear in the play, and are only recognized in the eye of the storm of Lear's madness, a madness increased by the acid scorn of the king's Fool's outraged sense of self-protection and self-interest which the Fool thought was in Lear's safekeeping:

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[18] Johnson, p. 74.

> FOOL Sirrah, you were best take my coxcomb.
> KENT Why, fool?
> FOOL Why? For taking one's part that's out of
> favor. Nay, and thou canst not smile as the
> wind sits, thou'lt catch cold shortly.
> There, take my coxcomb. Why, this fellow
> has banished two on's daughters, and did the
> third a blessing against his will. If thou
> follow him, thou must needs wear my coxcomb.
> How now, nuncle? Would I had two coxcombs
> and two daughters.
> LEAR Why, my boy?
> FOOL If I gave them all my living, I'ld keep my
> coxcombs myself. There's mine; beg another
> of thy daughters.
> LEAR Take heed, sirrah--the whip.
> (I.iv. 92-104)

The tragic course of Lear's career of powerlessness brought on by his own folly leads him into regions of the "poem unlimited," into glimpses of ordinary life and the neglected corners of his kingdom where he wanders as an outcast. In comic terms, Lear has broken the natural human bonds that in The Comedy of Errors the Abbess and Egeon have waited so long to restore; there the two parents act as metaphors of hope, by bringing together a lost family and seeing come to fruition the reunification they have hoped for, but not seen, for so long. Consequently, Lear finds normalcy in parts of his kngdom he had previously never thought about.

King Lear is such a whirling and fantastic structure that its glimpses of loving, diurnal, ordinary life are very fleeting. The natural background is for the most part a stormy, barren heath, but after the storm and Lear's madness subside, we do get glimpses of the comedy matrix again, though not get much of a glimpse from Lear's Fool. Comic subplot characters usually reduce dramatic tension in Shakespeare's tragedies, as the grave-digger does in Hamlet, but Lear's fool increases it.

> Lear's abdication of his kingship and his treatment of Cordelia are false to three obligations he owes in nature: a king should rule; a father should guide and cherish children, even when they go astray, just as children should love and protect their parents no matter how badly they have been mistreated; and an old man should be wise. All these natural principles are underscored repeatedly by Kent and the Fool: 'Thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown when thou gav'st thy gold one away . . . thou mad'st thy daughters thy mothers. . .' (I.iv.177-88). . . . these protactic characters also call Lear a fool in so many words, not once, but often.[19]

Because the subplot of Gloucester, Edgar, and Edmund repeats the victimization of parent by child, no comic parody of the action in the main plot relieves the tragic atmosphere in King Lear. Instead, Gloucester gets a glimpse of the comic matrix of the ordinary and the everyday in Edgar's words about samphire-gathering on the face of Dover Cliff:

> How fearful
> And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low!
> The crows and choughs that wing the midway air
> Show scarce so gross as beetles. Halfway down
> Hangs one that gathers samphire--dreadful trade;
> Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.
> (IV.vi.12-8)

We get a sudden glimpse, in an illusion imposed on the illusion of drama itself, of man caught in ordinary life between a great height and the safety of solid ground. Visually we have an equivalent to the temporal middle ground the grave-digger and the Shepherd's clown inhabit. The inhabitants of Shakespeare's "poem unlimited" occupy this precarious middle position, which is nevertheless much more hopeful than the hopelessly futile state of transcendence Lear envisions for himself and Cordelia:

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[19] Virgil Whitaker, The Mirror Up to Nature, San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1965, p. 214.

> No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison.
> We two alone will sing like birds i'th' cage.
> When thou does ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
> And ask of thee forgiveness. So we'll live,
> And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
> At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
> Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too-
> Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out--
> And take upon's the mystery of things
> As if we were God's spies; and we'll wear out,
> In a walled prison, packs and sects of great ones
> That ebb and flow by the moon.
> (V.i.8-19)

This transcendant humility parallels Edgar's vain hope that the worst is over, before he sees his bleeding and sightless father led in, and knows he has not seen the worst yet.

Lear's Fool could be called, for want of a better term, self-interested. He is limited by status and mental capacity in the kind of active sympathy he can show to others, unlike Edgar, Cordelia, and most profoundly, Lear. The Fool speaks betrayal because he, like a child, has trusted his welfare to Lear's safekeeping, and his biting resentment comes from his early recognition that Lear has abdicated that responsibility along with his crown. Yet true to the forgiving nature of all Shakespeare's clowns and fools, his resentment of Lear's folly disappears as Lear's situation grows more desperate. Lear's Fool, however, is far different from the rest of Shakespeare's clown population, and we must look elsewhere in King Lear for the comedy matrix. The Fool is more a tragic character than a comic sympathizer. Along with Cordelia, he shares the consequences of Lear's folly.

The return to the diurnal in King Lear usually comes about in visual terms. Lear's great soliloquy describes "ghost" characters, since they have no part in the drama, but Lear finally sees what his neglect means for them:

> In, boy; go first. You houseless poverty--
> Nay, get thee in. I'll pray, and then I'll sleep.
> Poor naked wretches whersoe'er you are,
> That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
> How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
> Your looped and windowed raggedness, defend you
> From seasons such as these? O' I have ta'en
> Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;
> Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
> That thou mayst shake the superflux to them
> And show the heavens more just.
> (III.ii.26-37)

The link forged between Lear's outraged sense of injustice at the hands of his daughters, and the economic and social injustice his pride and pomp have brought to the rest of his kingdom gives Lear a stability he otherwise lacks in his agonized desire to know where his daughters' injustice comes from, and his desire to punish "Filial ingratitude." "Is it not as this mouth should tear this hand/ For lifting food to it? But I will punish home" (III.iv.14-16). Charity and a tragic commitment do not normally go together, but in this play agonizing and paradoxical combinations of genres manage to co-exist at the limits of what is expressible in language itself. Miraculously, Lear manages to find both gratitude and a sympathetic love in his torment, and in doing so discovers a kind of foundation to life after everything has been taken away from him that he complacently counted on as his own. Of course, he loses that, too, in the remorseless process of this tragedy.

In his comforting speech to Cordelia, Lear attempts to return to a semblance of normal life (as Edgar's description of life spread below Dover Cliffs attempts to do), and the reader must admit the lines are very humble and very beautiful. Nevertheless, his attempt is doomed, because there are simply too many forces militating against his gratitude. He would like to return to a loving, benign, timeless existence, a kind of comic matrix, but his hope masks a desperately ardent spiritual grandioseness. Lear envisions an eternity of forgiveness and reconciliation for Cordelia and himself while on one side, the good characters are trying to save him and on the other, the bad characters are trying to kill him. Where Gloucester is cheered by the illusion of magical salvation that his son creates to lift his spirits from despair, Lear trusts in a tragically vulnerable illusion:

> Gloucester is brought to salvation, as to destruction, by a strategy. He is of the weaker sort whose faith must be confirmed by miracles. Lear is made of sterner stuff, and he needs only

> Cordelia's love and the assurance of her forgiveness. Just as he precipitated his own fall, so he finds through suffering his own way to rise.[20]

Lear does not have the privilege of letting the world be. That privilege is reserved for Prospero, who has rejoined the human condition and become "most faint" without his magic power. Prospero asks for the forgiveness from the audience he needs to continue as an ordinary mortal, and he has earned his rest; he has changed one heart (Alonzo's) and contained one serious attempt at evil. Lear, on the other hand, never saw the world as realistically as Prospero does. He has "ever but slenderly known himself" (King Lear I.i. 293) and, seen from the comic perspective, he should have known the nature of his two eldest daughters better.

He is stripped of the illusion of peace with the world when he finds Cordelia hanged, but he dies with his last temporal illusion intact, that Cordelia still lives. According to Aristotle, in tragedy a great man will fall from greatness and his life will end in death, but usually not in such a remorselessly hopeless kind of death. The images themselves, of Lear's "prison" speech to Cordelia tell us that the humility of his imaginative powerlessness (which he shares with the clowns of Hamlet and The Winter's Tale) has elements of hyperbole still, and that what Lear had not dared to hope for, a reconciliation with his beloved and banished younger daughter, will be taken away from him too.

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[20] Whitaker, p. 218.

King Lear is a tragedy echoing with the cruel laughter of the gods, a comedy of the grotesque which is beyond human comprehension.[21] It is possible that Lear, if he is viewed from such an Olympian critical perspective, is at least an echo of a classical *miles gloriosus*, a kind of Samson of powerlessness. If we see him from such a perspective, he has much in common with Terence's Thraso. His pretensions to forgiveness and reconciliation with a fundamentally tragic fate are not so different from the pretensions of a character in Roman comedy. Ignoring the conditions set out for a tragic drama, Lear becomes, then, an undefined kind of *alazon*, or imposter.

Seen from this perspective, Lear changes from tragic protagonist to comic antagonist, a man too ambitious about the metaphysical foundation of good and loving children to prosper long. Shakespeare nearly wrenches his play out of its genre with strong suggestions of the competing genre, and then with the next tragic misfortune returns it to the genre it belongs in. Comedy, after all, uncovers the failings of its major characters, and especially those like Lear's and Gloucester's. Lear is judged in a more metaphysical way (or seemingly so), because Gloucester is judged (or thinks he is) exclusively for his sexual indiscretions. Even Gloucester's son Edgar, whose "optimism" has been tested and hardened by misfortune, and whose sympathy steadily deepens towards the mystery of evil and suffering, thinks that is why his father has suffered. Sexual morality occupies an uneasy place in King Lear, while it is an accepted part of the moral judgement of the other tragedies. In Lear himself, sexual loathing is present, because he seems to have bred such monsters in his two eldest daughters, but Gloucester, who has been callous to his own sexual indiscretions, suffers for far more specific sins. The play's attitude toward sexual union is far from comic in Lear, but the remorseless levelling of spiritual pretensions does seem to evoke a unique kind of comic consciousness, as G. Wilson Knight points out in The Wheel of Fire.

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[21] Knight, "King Lear and the Comedy of the Grotesque," *The Wheel of Fire*, London: Methuen and Company, 1983, pp. 160-176.

We are reminded, after all, that even in Cordelia's gentle nature there rests a conviction that her elder sisters will not take care of Lear after she is gone. Cordelia has no illusions about her sisters' natures, while Lear does; she can distinguish between good and evil better than Lear can, so we know from the beginning that Lear will be living in a dangerous illusion of kindness, filial love, and gratitude where none of these exist. That is a joke on a parent, which Lear's Fool instantly recognizes:

> LEAR When were you wont to be so full of songs
> sirrah?

FOOL I have used it, nuncle, e'er since thou
mad'st thy daughters thy mothers; for when
thou gav'st them the rod and put'st down
thine own breeches,

(Sings) Then they for sudden joy did weep,
And I for sorrow sung
That such a king should play bo-peep
And go the fools among.
(I.v. 162-69)

King Lear makes room for comedy of a savage and inhuman kind, and is infused with a comic spirit far removed from the benign corrective influence of the comic characters in Shakespeare's "poem unlimited." It is in a statement of the unutterable that comedy in *King Lear* works, and the comic statement is unique; none of Shakespeare's other four major tragedies is infused with this particular, merciless kind of comedy.

In *Macbeth* more than in Shakespeare's other major tragedies the consequences of a momentous action are explored. The "private" imaginative world of the usurper becomes more important to the playwright than the public consequences of his action; the harrowing effect of Macbeth's crimes on his conscience is what interested Shakespeare most in this tragedy. As far as "tragic" action is concerned, Macbeth is close to being damned by his ambition at the moment the play begins, and he lacks only the act of murder to set in motion a train of consequences that the witches already anticipate. Shakespeare creates a green king in Duncan to emphasize the violation of the natural order Macbeth's crime will bring about.

DeQuincey's classic essay, "On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth" makes the point that a recognition of evil comes about in the instant after evil has occurred; in the sudden awareness of the violation to human life which Macbeth's murder of Duncan has brought about, the private world of the evil doer is revealed, and simultaneously the unoffending nature of the world he has transgressed against is recognized.

> . . . In order that a new world may step in, this world must for a time disappear. The murderers and the murdered must be insulated--cut off by an immeasurable gulf from the ordinary tide and succession of human affairs--locked up and sequestered in some deep recess; we must be made sensible that the world of ordinary life is suddenly arrested, asleep, tranced, racked into a dread armistice; time must be annihilated, relation to things without abolished; and all must pass self-withdrawn into a deep syncope and suspension of earthly passion. Hence it is that, when the deed is done, when the work of darkness is perfect, then the world of darkness passes away like a pageantry in the clouds: the knocking at the gate is heard, and it makes known audibly that the reaction has commenced; the human has made its reflux upon the fiendish; the pulses of life are beginning to beat again; and the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live first makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that has suspended them.[22]

DeQuincey's description of the hiatus which marks the shift from comedy to tragedy in Macbeth, highly impressionistic and imaginative though it is, deals with the same middle ground of comedy, whether it be spatial, as in the case of the samphire-gatherer in King Lear, or temporal, as in the meeting between Hamlet and the uncomplicated memory of the grave-digger, or as in the conflict among the contesting elements of earth, water, and sky which the clown observes in The Winter's Tale.

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[22] David Masson, ed. The Collected Writings of Thomas DeQuincey, London: A.& C. Black, 1897. Volume X, p. 393.

Two awarenesses come into opposition with each other when Duncan visits Macbeth's castle. In effect, Macbeth meets with "things dying," aware like Marlowe's and Shakespeare's other murderers that he possesses an unholy omniscience of knowing when his victim will die. Meanwhile, Duncan meets with "things new-born:"

KING This castle hath a pleasant seat. The air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.
BANQUO This guest of summer,
The temple-haunting martlet, doth approve
By his loved masonry that the heaven's breath
Smells wooingly here. No jutty, frieze,
Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
Hath made his pendant bed and procreant cradle.
Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed
The air is delicate.
(I.vi.1-10)

Duncan does not anticipate what is waiting for him, for his senses tell him that he has come to a fertile and pleasant rural seat, a castle whose atmosphere "smells wooingly," that is, produces a fragrance which attracts the fertile rhythms of nature. Even in tragedy, Shakespeare never abandons the surrounding world with its peaceful rhythms of life; as readers we are always reminded that this world exists, and that the "poem unlimited" and the inhabitants of it always exist. Thus Shakespeare adds another dimension to his tragic story, a dimension of natural life often missing in the tragic dramas of his contemporaries.

Some of the tragedies by Shakespeare's near-contemporary and contemporary dramatic rivals, like Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy (1585-89), Marlowe's Doctor Faustus (1590-94), Chapman's Bussy D'Ambois (1610-13), and Webster's Dutchess of Malfi and White Devil (1612-14) all seem closed dramas by comparison. Even Doctor Faustus, which roams the crystalline spheres of the Renaissance universe, sets its best dramatic action into the limitations of the stage. Faustus achieves his moments of greatest dramatic tension and terror in his study.[23] Other Renaissance tragedies seem to take place in closed chambers, making the resources and limitations of the stage apparent. Shakespearean tragedy, on the other hand, makes us aware of the natural world beyond the stage; in his tragedies we become as aware of that world as we do of the forested places of Frye's "green world" in the early and middle comedies. The inhabitants of the natural background to the tragedies are quite as important as the natural rhythms of the natural world Shakespeare's tragic protagonists often violate.

The characters of the "poem unlimited" are, like the martlets at Macbeth's castle, mostly unnoticed, but always in the background. In a tragedy so closely identified with external forces of evil, the appearance of a comic character is a rare occurrence: our sudden and instant identification of the Porter as a citizen of the same diurnal world Shakespeare's comedy characters inhabit, with the same punning and word-play, reminds us of the world Macbeth's ambition has violated. The porter knocks on our consciousness with his speech repetitions as he walks to the gate to open it. He signals the hell Macbeth has created in the seemingly safe confines of his ancestral castle, before he opens the gate to Macduff and Ross. The porter's cheerful intimation of revelling the night before clashes strangely with the evidence we possess from the previous scene that the murder of Duncan has just been completed--"Faith, sir, we were carousing until the second cock;" (II.iii.22). The revelling, however, has only made Duncan's grooms easy victims of Macbeth's plan to place the blame for the regicide somewhere else.

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[23] Whitaker, pp. 6-7.

Shakespeare invests Macbeth's conscience with the dimensions of his transgression. His guilt is compounded by the number of natural blessings in life he has violated. He is even inwardly pinched by his recognition that he has victimized some nameless sleeping grooms, taken advantage of them when they are most vulnerable.

> Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more!
> Macbeth does murder sleep'--the innocent sleep,
> Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleave of care,
> The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath,
> Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
> Chief nourisher in life's feast.
> (II.ii.34-39)

Shakespeare reminds us continually of the natural forces Macbeth's crime violates. Macbeth's conscience returns to the circumstances which make his crime "perfect" and accuses him of more than the action which has rid him of an obstacle in his path to an earthly crown. In the tragic genre, the "poem unlimited" is the comic matrix against which the tragic isolation of the protagonists is defined.

Shakespeare's language provides the background to Macbeth's eventual antagonism towards the forces of nature itself. When Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane, when the green world advances on the fortress of Macbeth's castle, a scene which Susan Snyder has analyzed brilliantly, we understand that this background becomes a self-healing, subversive natural force opposed to the life-destroying ambition of Macbeth and his wife.[24] Deep in the context of the evil of the play, the three witches know that, and they also know that Macbeth's attraction to evil will destroy him. Evil, even in its rhetorical function, knows the nature of the life forces opposed to it.

There is almost no overtly comic action in Macbeth, but there is enough to remind the reader that the genre of tragedy does not abandon the creative forces of comedy in Shakespeare. C.L. Barber correctly aligned the comic genre with fertility festivals and the spirit of misrule, but I think he narrows the compass of his thesis too much. Shakespeare used the same natural forces in his tragedies to deepen the tragic effect, to convince the reader that the consequences of tragic action extend much farther than the protagonist is aware of. Holiday criticizes everyday, according to Barber, illuminating the characteristics of comedy, but his thesis could be extended to include tragedy by changing the slogan slightly: everyday criticizes and isolates the last day, which is the day when tragic action becomes irretrievable to comic sympathy. Of course, tragedy does not stop there; there would be no tragedy if the tragic protagonist considered his actions too closely. Hamlet is warned against doing that very thing by his loyal friend Horatio, and the bloody ending of Hamlet demonstrates to us that Shakespeare understood the more primitive dramatic effects of the Senecan revenge play, and gave up Hamlet's philosophical nature in exchange for an extensive and inefficient slaughter at the end of the play.[25]

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[24] Susan Snyder, The Comic Matrix of Shakespearean Tragedy, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, p. 24.

Othello also mixes the comic and tragic genres, but not in a way which allows the reader readily to identify the comic matrix, or "poem unlimited." Instead, we recognize the persistent influence of Iago and his gull Roderigo on the main plot, and we gradually realize that the comic "vice" and "gull" have a fatal influence on the tragic hero.

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[25] Fredson Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, 1587-1642, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940, passim.

Bradley is right when he calls Iago an artist, because Iago is an artist at destroying Othello's faith in love itself. A definition of Iago would also incorporate G. Wilson Knight's identification of Iago as a destroyer of the world's created beauty. Though the two critics' views are opposed, Iago seems to combine them, hating Othello's happiness and aristocratic virtues, and artistically creating a case for Desdemona's infidelity from the flimsiest circumstantial evidence and the most precise timing in presenting this evidence to Othello.

A clown who puns and indulges in other word-play makes two brief appearances (Act III, scenes i and iii), but provides little relief for the headlong rush of the tragic plot. Roderigo, the gull, is the major comic character in _Othello_. He somewhat resembles Sir Andrew Aguecheek, in that both Sir Toby Belch and Iago use gulls and their money for their own purposes. In _Twelfth Night_ Aguecheek gives up his love suit after Olivia marries Sebastian, but Roderigo continues in his absurd pursuit of Desdemona after she has married Othello at the beginning of the play. Roderigo reminds the reader of the old cartoon of the disappointed suitor standing on the steps of the church, still hoping, as the woman whose hand he hopes to win comes out in her wedding dress on her new husband's arm.

The genuine tragedy of the play begins with the reaction of Brabantio and his relatives and friends to the news of the "stolen" match. Brabantio is the abused senex, a role he shares in a very general way with Shylock, and he is convinced that his daughter has been stolen from him by magic charms. The Duke of Venice respects Othello's defense of his marriage, but Iago will skillfully use Brabantio's bitter taunt to Othello as the victorious general is leaving for Cyprus to convince Othello of his wife's infidelity: "Look to her Moor, if thou has eyes to see:/ She has deceived her father and may thee" (I.iii.291-3).

In the first scene Roderigo enters complaining, evidently about Othello's marriage, and Iago puts the gull into his plan for the destruction of Othello. The strategy may be a subversion of the meaning of the first epistle of Peter: "The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner" (Peter 2:7). Brabantio even tells Roderigo "My daughter is not for thee" (Othello I.i.99), but Iago will be able to use the discarded suitor to get Cassio cashiered, which will in turn cause Cassio to importune Desdemona to help reinstate him, which will in turn increase Othello's suspicion of Desdemona.

Roderigo makes a willing audience for Iago's ugly suspicions about the nature of Desdemona's love--anything that hints at impermanence in her relationship with Othello Roderigo eagerly accepts as offering him hope. The irony is that Roderigo steadily lowers his expectations as Iago's case builds; he expects marriage first, then hopes for love outside of marriage, then hopes for a chance to woo Desdemona by getting her imaginary lover Cassio out of the way.

> IAGO . . .So shall you have a shorter journey to your
> desires by the means I shall then have to prefer
> them; and the impediment most profitably removed
> without the which there were no expectation of
> our prosperity.
> RODERIGO I will do this if you can bring it to any
> opportunity.
> (II.i.270-6)

Roderigo may reflect Venetian suspicion about Desdemona's love for Othello, but his gulling is so egregious and he is so spiritless that he becomes a dangerously forgettable character in the plot. His love sets him in sharp contrast to the purity and absoluteness of Othello's love for Desdemona. Roderigo's hope to remove all blocks to his love becomes a dangerous absurdity to the rational hopes of the newly married couple; in fact, he would be a dangerous absurdity to the rational hopes of *any* newly-married couple in *any* play.

Like Macbeth, Iago violates the peace of night, first to interrupt the *senex* Brabantio's chamber, and next to disturb the sleep of Othello and Desdemona the night they consummate their marriage, when all have come safely through the storm to Cyprus. The last destruction of sleep in the tragedy occurs when Othello wakes Desdemona in their bedchamber to smother her. At the beginning of the play, however, the interruption of sleep with noise represents the breaking-in of Venetian suspicion and fear towards an exotic foreigner, feelings which are distilled into a destructive purpose in Iago. Iago is a distillation of gall, as opposed to the metaphor of the distillation of flowers contained in Shakespeare's advice to his friend to marry in Sonnet 5. Iago can work his destructive purpose without interference in Cyprus because, in effect, Othello and Desdemona have been disowned by Brabantio and his background of relatives and friends, and must face the world alone there, where Othello formerly made a place for himself: "How does my old acquaintance of this isle?/. . . I have found great love amongst them" (II.ii. 202-5).

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> *Enter Othello's Herald, with a proclamation*.
> HERALD It is Othello's pleasure, our noble and valiant general, that, upon certain tidings now arrived, importing the mere perdition of the Turkish fleet, every man put himself into triumph; some to dance, some to make bonfires, each man to what sport and revels his addiction leads him. For, besides these beneficial news, it is the celebration of his nuptial. So much was his pleasure should be proclaimed. All offices are open, and there is full liberty of feasting from the present hour of five till the bell hath told eleven. Heaven bless the noble isle of Cyprus and our noble general Othello!
> *Exit*.
>
> (II.ii. 1-11)

Iago's diabolical destruction of that general background of happiness, accompanied, as Bernard Spivack points out,[26] by the characteristic vaunting and boasting of the "vice" figure of the morality plays, destroys a happiness which is in harmony with its background: the comic background, which fosters marriage, has for its enemy a character who uses the language of growth and fertility to describe how his destruction of that happiness progresses:

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[26] Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1958, pp. 3-60.

> IAGO. . . Cassio hath beaten thee,
> And thou by that small hurt hast cashiered Cassio.
> Though other things grow fair against the sun,
> Yet fruits that blossoms first will first be ripe.
> Content thyself awhile. By the mass, 'tis morning!
> Pleasure and action make the hours seem short.
> (II.ii.356-61)

Bradley calls the passage "ghastly."[27] Iago's use of the images of fertility to signal the exact opposite shows how much he is opposed to the major assumption of comedy, a happy ending in marriage. As G. Wilson Knight says, Iago is well aware of the beauty of the world he sets himself against. He has the admiration Satan does for the goodness and vulnerability of his victims in Paradise Lost, Books IV and IX. Iago uses the gull to get control over Cassio, then uses Cassio to importune Desdemona, and then her generous nature to control Othello:

> For 'tis most easy
> Th'inclining Desdemona to subdue
> In any honest suit; she's framed as fruitful
> As the free elements.
> (II.iii.322-5)

We speculate that if Romeo and Juliet had been able to get away from Verona, they would have had a good chance at happiness, but tragic misunderstandings and a delayed letter prevented them from getting any farther than the family crypt of the Capulets; Othello and Desdemona do, on the other hand, break away, and the background of civilian life in Cyprus is more hospitable to them than Venice would have been. The personal celebration of the beginning of their marriage coincides with the background of a victory festival celebrating the island's deliverance from the Turkish fleet, so all should be well. Yet the absurd and hapless gull is the forgotten detail of the military-civilian world in which Othello and Desdemona consummate their marriage. Subverting the Biblical passage from the first epistle of Peter, Roderigo becomes the "corner" in the case Iago builds against Desdemona and Othello. The disgust Othello feels for his wife's supposed infidelity may echo the Biblical passage.

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[27] A.C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, London: Macmillan, 1967, p. 230.

> . . . I had rather be a toad
> And live upon the vapor of a dungeon
> Than keep a corner in the thing I love
> For others' uses.
> (III.iii. 270-3)

Roderigo is the "building stone" Iago uses to build the seemingly solid and irrefutable case against Desdemona. The absurd persistence of his suit gives Iago the opportunity to destroy Othello's happiness. The world of comedy, or perhaps a character from the world of satirical city comedy, imposes on the world of romantic love to help create tragedy. Thus the tragic core of Othello is the place in Othello's mind where his knowledge of his wife's sterling qualities confronts the evidence of his wife's infidelity:

> OTHELLO This fellow's of exceeding honesty,
> And knows all qualities, with a learned spirit
> Of human dealings. If I do prove her haggard,
> Though that her jesses were my very
> heartstrings,
> I'd whistle her off and let her down the wind
> To prey at fortune. Haply, for I am black,
> And have not those soft parts of conversation
> That chamberers have, or for I am declined
> Into the vale of years--yet that's not much--
> She's gone. I am abused, and my relief
> Must be to loathe her.
> (III.iii. 258-68)

G. Wilson Knight explains what Othello's sudden and ominous capitulation to his conviction of Desdemona's infidelity means:

> It is true that Iago is here a mysterious, inhuman creature of unlimited cynicism: but the very presence of the concrete creations around, in differentiating him sharply from the rest, limits and defines him. Othello is a story of intrigue rather than a visionary statement.[28]
>
> . . .Now on the plane of personification we see that Othello and Desdemona are concrete, molded of flesh and blood, warm. Iago contrasts with them metaphysically as well as morally: he is unlimited, formless villainy. He is the spirit of denial, wholly negative.[29]

Iago sets himself against an enfolding darkness which is yet warm and nurturing. The colorlessness he represents contrasts sharply with the stately martial dignity of Othello and the Petrarchan beauty of Desdemona. As audience we do not see Iago change to hatred of Othello's achieved life, but we do see the mysterious process at work in

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[28] Knight, p. 97.

[29] Knight, p. 116.

Othello, even though everything Othello summons up in his mind to prove Iago's case against her speaks for Desdemona's warm humanity:

> 'Tis not to make me jealous
> To say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company
> Is free of speech, sings, plays, and dances;
> Where virtue is, these are more virtuous.
> (III.iii. 183-6)

> OTHELLO Hang her! I do but say what she is. So delicate with her needle! An admirable musician! O, she will sing the savageness out of a bear! Of so high and plenteous wit and invention--
> IAGO She's the worse for all this.
> OTHELLO O, a thousand thousand times! And then of so gentle a condition!
> (IV.i. 184-90)

> . . . Yet I'll not shed her blood,
> Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,
> And smooth as monumental alabaster.
> Yet she must die else she'll betray more men.
> Put out the light, and then put out the light.
> If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,
> If I can again thy former light restore,
> Should I repent me: but once put out thy light,
> Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,
> I know not where is that Promethean heat
> That can thy light relume. When I have plucked the rose,
> I cannot give it vital growth again;
> It needs must wither. I'll smell thee on the tree.
> He kisses her.
>
> (V.ii.3-15)

As Othello is poised to sacrifice his wife on the altar of virtue, he first sees her as if she were a full-length carving in marble, a statue reposing on the cover of a tomb, but the severe dignity of his language warms into the Petrarchan metaphor of the rose on the tree which is warm and fragrant and living. The transition from death to life, in surpassingly beautiful blank verse, shows how much Othello must deny his own perception to believe Iago's diabolical suggestions.

There are no answers to Othello's question, "Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil/ Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body?" (V.ii. 300-1). Comedy demands an explanation of human motives, in one form or another. For example, Volpone and The Alchemist seem slightly mysterious as comedies because their scams are their reason for being, and when the swindles are exposed, Jonson's comic characters, who have so much frantic energy while the scams are going, no longer have a reason to exist. Iago, however, has made a tragic gull of Othello, has caused him to kill his reason for being, and Othello the tragic protagonist has nothing left to live for; this is a destruction so complete we must avoid thinking about this tragedy in comic terms too closely:

> . . . the jealous Moor would seem to us as fatuous as Roderigo were it not for the unique circumstances of his personality, his race, his innocence of Venetian society, and his belated discovery of a love so rare and miraculous as to be outside the ordinary realm of belief.[30]

Comedy demands a motive for its actions--even in Shakespeare's tragi-comedies potentially tragic action undergoes penance and reconciliation at the end of the plays, but Othello himself says his action is beyond forgiveness. Therefore Othello must fall back on his "honorable" record to permit himself a dignified death. His last action is not that of a tragic protagonist, but the action of a general who has the responsibility for the welfare of civilians in his command. When Othello mentions the incident of the Turk he killed for "traducing the state" he is reminding his tragic audience of his decisive control over a population he is protecting. Othello knew precisely what to do when he had to stop the brawling of the guard the first night in Cyprus:

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[30] Robert Ornstein, The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1960, p. 228.

> Give me to know
> How this foul rout began, who set it on;
> . . . .
> . . . What! in a town of war,
> Yet wild the people's hearts brimful of fear
> To manage private and domestic quarrel?
> In night, and on the court and guard of safety?
> (II.iii. 199-206)

Othello finds himself guilty of the same infraction; thus he takes summary justice on himself when he finds himself the enemy within. His "last" command as a military governor restores the civil peace he never expected to disturb. The comic background of civil peace and domestic harmony are the comic background Othello remains true to. He cannot reconcile his egregious gulling with the domestic happiness he found briefly, but he can protect that life from his own inward disorder, so he turns his blade on himself.

Antony and Cleopatra has a more explicit comic matrix than the other four major tragedies, a comic matrix set against the military world of Rome:

> Let Rome in Tiber melt and the wide arch
> Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space,
> Kingdoms are clay: our dungy earth alike
> Feeds beasts as man.
> (I.i.33-6)

Antony will regret the complacent unthinking nature of that boast when Cleopatra treacherously changes into a farm animal and abandons Antony's fleet, taking her Egyptian squadrons with her at the sea-battle of Actium:

> You ribaudred nag of Egypt--
> Whom leprosy overtake--i 'the midst o' the fight,
> When vantage like a pair of twins appeared,
> Both as the same, or rather ours the elder,
> The breese upon her, like a cow in June
> Hoists sails and flies.
> (III.x. 10-15)

As much as Antony deplores the unmilitary behavior of his bewitching partner in empire, he compounds the military felony, and he turns into a waterfowl and joins her:

> She, once being loofed,
> The noble ruins of her magic, Antony,
> Claps on his sea wing, and (like a doting
> mallard)
> Leaving the fight in heighth, flies after her.
> (III.x.18-21)

These metamorphoses into unmartial kinds of animals are surprising to Antony. Throughout the play the natural world, which is the background Cleopatra is allied with and is, as we have seen, the comic matrix of all the major tragedies, provides ominous signs of her unfittingness to fight:

> Swallows have built
> In Cleopatra's sails their nests. The augurers
> Say they know not, they cannot tell, look grimly,

And dare not speak their knowledge. Antony
Is valiant and dejected, and by starts
His fretted fortunes give him hope and fear
Of what he has, and has not.
(IV.xii. 3-8)

We are reminded of the "temple-haunting martlets" which nest in every available place on Macbeth's castle, but instead of violating the fertile cycles of nature, Cleopatra, like the swallows, represents those cycles:

AGRIPPA Royal Wench!
She made great Caesar lay his sword to bed;
He ploughed her, and she cropped.
ENOBARBUS I saw her once
Hop forty paces through the public street;
And having lost her breath, she spoke, and panted,
That she did make defect perfection
And breathless pow'r breathe forth.
MAECENAS Now Antony must leave her utterly.
ENOBARBUS Never; he will not:
Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety: other women cloy
The appetites they feed, but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies. For vilest things
Become themselves in her, that the holy priests
Bless her when she is riggish.
(II.ii.227-41)

Where Cleopatra is concerned, sexual longing is holy. The decorum of Shakespeare's comedies, in which sex is referred to marriage at the end, becomes sexual passion in Shakespeare's tragedies of love, and a part of the tragic commitment. Cleopatra and her way of life form a "poem unlimited" of female prerogatives and fertility, destructive to the monumental (and unliving) forms Rome would build. Cleopatra, in opposition to the Roman world, is used to letting things take their course. In Julius Caesar Antony satisfies Caesar that he is not as lean and hungry as his competitors for empire; and therefore Caesar trusts him, but Antony himself is confronted with a different kind of treachery with Cleopatra: the treachery of a woman's whims regarding war. She is opposed to everything which would take Antony away from her. She is not designed to fight, and will not allow her soldier to fight either. Her kingdom is costly and golden, but it is also a kingdom of growth and decay in the long historical perspective, and so inimical to the empire-building of Rome.

If the reader searches for a metaphor to describe Cleopatra, the salt fish she hangs on Antony's hook might do: fairly well-preserved, a bait and a joke on Antony, and impossible if one wants to build any monumental form. Unlike Iago, who perversely builds destructive illusions, Cleopatra builds illusions only about her warlike abilities, but not about her love-making. If Iago is the artist of the destruction of love, Cleopatra is the artist of the variety and willingness of love. She shares Antony's doomed enthusiasm about his ability to divide his time unequally (the major portion of it devoted to Cleopatra), yet defeat a cold professional empire-builder and military commander like Octavius in war. But she changes her mind in the midst of a sea-fight and abandons that enthusiasm.

Antony might try to impose his military profession on Cleopatra and the annual flooding of the land she represents, but his profession does not exist in her Egypt. Cleopatra meets every military qualm of Antony's with sarcasm.

> CLEOPATRA Saw you my lord?
> ENOBARBUS No, lady.
> CLEOPATRA Was he not here?
> CHARMIAN No, madam.
> CLEOPATRA He was disposed to mirth but on a sudden
> A Roman thought hath struck him.Enobarbus!
> (I.ii.76-80)

She has already been mistress to the greatest Roman general, Julius Caesar, and the greatest Roman admiral, Pompey, so she is experienced in handling military commanders, but that is not the point here. Even though Antony is the second generation from Rome to stay in Egypt, he is, she tells us, the only soldier who exists for her.

> CHARMIAN The valiant Caesar!
> CLEOPATRA By Isis, I will give thee bloody teeth
> If thou with Caesar paragon again
> My man of men.
> CHARMIAN By your most gracious pardon,
> I sing but after you.
> CLEOPATRA My salad days,
> When I was green in judgement, cold in blood,
> To say as I said then.
> (I.v. 70-7)

Whatever awe she might have had for the martial accomplishments of Rome is long gone; her sensibility is feminine and she slows, confuses, and finally confounds Antony's political sensibility for her own way of living life. Antony's effectiveness as a military commander is ruined by Cleopatra's dangerously obtuse spirit of play, her open-ended commitment to her own hospitality, and her necessary political expediency. Even Enobarbus, a popular soldier who feels a mixture of cynicism and admiration for Cleopatra's Egyptian world, sees her emotional displays toward Antony as allied with the forces of nature:

> her passions are made of nothing
> but the finest part of pure love. We cannot call
> her winds and waters sighs and tears; they are
> greater storms and tempests than almanacs can
> report. This cannot be cunning in her; if it be,
> she makes a shower of rain as well as Jove.
> (I.ii. 141-8)

Who can control the weather? Enobarbus' only mistake is that he misjudges how far Antony has abandoned the purposes of Rome for Cleopatra's love. Enobarbus stays with Antony as long as his loyalty for his commander does not interfere with his professional military judgement about Antony's success as a member of the triumvirate. While it would have been easy for Shakespeare to pair Enobarbus with one of Cleopatra's women, since he is as much a part of the revelry as Antony is, that doubling would take us into the matrix of Shakespeare's romantic comedy, and this time Shakespeare is writing a slightly different kind of drama; a basic "Roman" history play which becomes s soaring operatic tragedy, and ends in an unusual kind of comic marriage.

Shakespeare used the logic of a comic ending to produce a unique kind of tragedy. The comic feminine world defeats and enfolds the masculine Roman world, and produces as its dramatic progeny something operatic in the last two acts; the play's tragic intensity builds in Acts IV and V, when the spacious, splendid language achieves the tragic isolation of the other major tragedies, and yet ends in an affirmation of Antony and Cleopatra's marriage. The last two acts actually celebrate the consummation of the masculine Roman and feminine Egyptian worlds. Antony becomes a kind of Erasmian fool to love (love which the Romans consider dotage and folly), and Cleopatra becomes, with no other options available to her, a wife, choosing death to join her lover.

Enobarbus serves as a chorus to fill in the details of Antony's life in Egypt. He admires Cleopatra, understanding what she represents sooner than Antony does. He is the one who makes Cleopatra understandable to the subordinates of the Roman triumvirate. He does not comment on the action, but gives details about Cleopatra and her world; his comment takes visual form, transforming North's translation of Plutarch into blank verse. The famous speech describing Cleopatra's barge is almost a masque, laden with details that align her with the fertile forces of nature in Egypt. Antony's loyal lieutenant dies of a broken heart, overwhelmed with gratitude and grief when Antony sends him his share of empire-building treasure.

Shakespeare effects the transition from Roman history play to tragedy through the appearance of Eros, freed slave and military orderly. His name is a word which means sexual love. As a transitional figure, Eros signals Antony's imminent defeat at the business of empire and his total commitment to Cleopatra. When Antony puts on the armour Eros brings, he and his men are so aware of the possibility of defeat by Octavius' army, which is filled with the deserters from Antony's own army, that on the day of the last land-battle, Eros' own spirit nearly fails him as he helps Antony buckle his armour on.

> CLEOPATRA Is not this buckled well?
> ANTONY Rarely, rarely:
> He that unbuckles this, till we do please
> To daff't' for our repose, shall hear a storm.
> Thou fumblest, Eros, and my queen's a squire
> More tight at this than thou. Dispatch, O love,
> That thou could see my wars today, and knewst
> The royal occupation: thou shouldst see
> A workman in't.
> (IV.iv.12-18)

There is irony in Antony's eagerness for Cleopatra to see him do battle with a triumvir the Egyptian soothsayer once told Antony he could not defeat. Antony arms early in the morning, when all his army is sick at heart about the battle they will soon engage in. In a dramatic and emblematic context Antony is putting on the armour of love and going out to do battle as if he were a knight in a Spenserian allegorical combat. In a way which defies explanation, Antony's imminent battle (which he wins) has set itself in opposition to those the world owes tribute to; by this time Antony has made the change from empire-building to love, so he fights for values which are Cleopatra's and no longer his own. What he does not know is that he must eventually lose his empire to the more efficient victorious forces of

Octavius, but here, because he is armed for love (with Eros his armourer), he will win the first day.

Antony and Cleopatra ends with the death of the protagonists, but paradoxically it also ends in marriage. The order is reversed from Romeo and Juliet, and that makes all the difference. Comedy ends with marriage, yet this tragedy ends with an escape into a marriage in the next world, somewhat analogous to the escape of Shakespeare's middle-comedy characters into Frye's "green world" where complications are resolved and a new society forms around the hero and heroine. In Antony and Cleopatra the physicality of the world of fertility and decay Cleopatra represents is transmuted to a more rarified substance: "I am fire and air; my other elements/ I give to baser life" (A&C V.ii. 288), and Antony sets aside the armour of love in exchange for love itself; he sheds his defensive encumbrances so that he may become a bridegroom again, and, like Benedick, give up the martial life for another kind of commitment. Eros dies before Antony, but Antony forewarns the audience of his intentions when he hears the false news of Cleopatra's death: "Unarm, Eros. The long day's task is done/ And we must sleep" (IV.xiv.35).

Antony has no intention of outliving Cleopatra. Her death means he can stop fighting for love and give himself up completely to it: "But I will be a bridegroom in my death, and run into 't/ As to a lover's bed" (IV.xiv.99-

101). If the cycle of nature Cleopatra's world represents seems to Octavius too fecund and distracting for a proper Roman soldier, Shakespeare's language tells us that Antony and Cleopatra have escaped the criticism of their critics by transcending the venality the Roman world criticizes them for. Octavius has been excluded as surely as any prig in comedy from the space and freedom they have escaped to. In a sense, they have escaped into a purer form of comic drama than the one they lived in, where now all can be play and revelry, and the lovers and their entourage can arrange the materials of their existence at their own leisure.

Characteristically, Cleopatra's death holds center stage. She puts Antony in the shadow with her own display of a queenly way to die, just as she displayed herself to best advantage when they first met at Cydnus:

> The city cast
> Her people out upon her; and Antony,
> Enthroned in the marketplace, did sit alone,
> Whistling to th' air; which, but for vacancy,
> Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too,
> And made a gap in nature.
> (II.ii.214-9)

By Act V, we are caught up in her solo operatic performance and nearly forget about Antony's death. When the two first meet, we get a hint of the power of Cleopatra to make Antony's empire-building seem unimportant: Antony here has nothing to do, he has time on his hands, and he is ignored for the greater spectacle of Cleopatra. The loving, diurnal, rather splendid context of Cleopatra's comic world upstages

Antony's idling ambitions, and not until later does the striving, self-sacrificing world of Antony spiritualize Cleopatra's pleasure-seeking and raise the level of her commitment to a plane where she can meet Antony's devotion.

By contrast, in _Hamlet_ the diurnal context of comedy is a persistent illusion which is profoundly disturbing to the spirit. The inhabitants of Elsinore seem to live an unexceptionable life, so much so that Hamlet has to fight against attitudes which could be described as hypocritical, venal, complacent, unreflecting, sealed: the tone of Elsinore is as difficult to define exactly as is exposing the truth of Claudius' crime. The court of Denmark is a world attempting to live the routine life allotted to everyone, and Hamlet is a protagonist attempting to discover where to rediscover a world of normal life after speaking to the revengeful ghost of Hamlet Senior. Macbeth enacts his own crime, so he knows the origin and the consequences of his actions, but Hamlet has only a ghost's lead to follow and nothing substantial to corroborate the testimony of the spirit he talks to. He tests his friends and enemies for what they might know and conceal and finds, for the most part, a profound ignorance concerning what _he_ knows.

Comedy thrives on misunderstandings, and there are plenty of them in _Hamlet_; Hamlet misunderstands the intentions of most of the other characters in the play, and he is certainly misunderstood by them, with one exception.

He understands Polonius completely, understands all about his doddering affability, his obsequiousness, and his persistent spying for the king. With Polonius Hamlet can be arrogant and sure of himself, revealing a cruel and witty exuberance which is safe for him because of his pride of position and future power: after all, Hamlet is his uncle's heir presumptive, and Polonius knows it. What Polonius does not know is how much Hamlet seems to depend on the favor of his daughter, and how sick at heart he is about his position as heir presumptive at a time when all time is out of joint. Because Polonius is also the father of Ophelia, he is a comic senex, yet Hamlet could do more than give him the external forms of deference, if Polonius acted more like an ordinary senex and less like a fishmonger. As Hamlet says to the players (and he means it), "Follow that lord, and look you mock him not" (II.ii.529). Polonius has a close comedy parallel in Justice Shallow, a busy, sentimental character who is nostalgic about the past and possessed of a certain competence in day-to-day matters, but mostly out of his depth in the currents and cross-currents of the present.

However, Hamlet gets inextricably involved with the whole family of Polonius. In a series of actions whose consequences rapidly complicate the attachment of Hamlet to Ophelia's family in a way which imitates the best plotting of Roman New Comedy, Hamlet finds himself confronting all of them: first Polonius, then Ophelia as she follows the instructions of her father, then Polonius again when Hamlet kills him behind the arras. The death of Polonius leads to suspicion that Hamlet has not been honorable to Ophelia because she drowns herself; Hamlet then finds himself built into an ironic complex of consequences, of being somehow responsible for the honor of the entire family when he confronts Laertes at a freshly-dug grave, where two imperatives to revenge collide in a shouting match about who loved Ophelia the most, the lover or the protecting brother. No Terentian or Plautian comic protagonist could ask for more in the way of plot complications.

A sequence of events involving Hamlet with Ophelia's family is only a sample of the kind of intense concentration in _Hamlet_ on family and family concerns that usually characterizes a comic plot. If we focus more closely we can see how _Hamlet_ is a _tour de force_ of the conflict between comic and tragic plotting. For example, when Ophelia drowns, singing and bedecked with flowers, covered over with the natural ornaments of spring and summer, and at the peak of her attractiveness, we are left with a whole complex of unarticulated emotion. Ophelia herself vaguely blames the court circle for her father's death, remains bewildered by Hamlet's anger, and laments and takes seriously Hamlet's madness when he thinks she should understand his disillusionment. Yet when she drowns herself, there are no answers for her to the doubts and despair which have caused her end. Why is Ophelia so feckless? Why is Laertes so quick to assume Hamlet is the guilty one? Why is Polonius so corrupt? Why is Hamlet so preemptory and cruel in his judgements of the court circle? This is not comedy, or is it?

If Roderigo is a neglected and dangerous bit of comic characterization in the context of tragedy, Ophelia is a young and beautiful daughter of a lord, a more suitable match for Hamlet than Polonius' family knows, and a neglected comic resolution to a tragic plot. Laertes, however, warns Ophelia that Hamlet does not regard her a marriageable:

> Perhaps he loves you now,
> And now no soil nor cautel doth besmirch
> The virtue of his will, but you must fear,
> His greatness weighed, his will is not his own.
> (I.ii.14-7).

Polonius does not regard her as marriageable either, and he becomes the senex iratus, forbidding his daughter to see Hamlet again.

> In few, Ophelia,
> Do not believe his vows, for they are brokers,
> Not of that die which their investments show,
> But mere implorators of unholy suits,
> Breathing like sanctified and impious bawds,
> The better to beguile. This is for all:
> I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth
> Have you slander any moment's leisure
> As to give words or talk with the lord Hamlet.
> (I.iii.126-37)

The course of comic action has been set: "the obstacles to the hero's desire, then, form the action of the comedy, and the overcoming of them the comic resolution."[31] But Hamlet does not pursue Ophelia. He insults her instead, quite understandably, because he is sure Polonius is listening, and he may suspect that the King is listening too. Ophelia grants Hamlet audience, and then, at her father's bidding, makes herself unavailable:

OPHELIA Good my lord,
How does your honor for this many a day?
HAMLET I humbly thank you, well, well, well.
OPHELIA My lord I have remembrances of yours
That I have longed long to re-deliver.
I pray you, now receive them.
HAMLET No, not I,
I never gave you ought.
OPHELIA My honored lord, you know right well you did.
And with them words of so sweet breath composed
As made the things more rich. Their perfume lost
Take these again, for to the noble mind
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.
There my lord.
(III.i.84-95)

The lover gets back his love letters, together with a slightly mysterious accusation of having been cruel to his loved one. Possessed with the omniscience of the audience, we know that Ophelia obeys her father's manipulating command, and we know that Hamlet probably knows this, too.

POLONIUS Do you know me, my lord?
HAMLET Excellent well. You are a fishmonger.
(II.ii.172-4)

Still, it takes Hamlet by surprise, seemingly an unwarranted cruelty on the part of a girl who has been honestly wooed:

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[31] Frye, p. 164.

OPHELIA My lord, he hath importuned me with love
In honorable fashion.
POLONIUS Ay, fashion you may call it. Go to, go to.
OPHELIA And hath given countenance to his speech, my lord,
With almost all the holy vows of heaven.
(I.iii. 110-4)

In the nunnery scene, Hamlet speaks to Ophelia in a rage, insults her, questions her virtue, and finally speaks against the foundation of comedy itself: "I say we will have no more marriage. Those that are married already--all but one--shall live. The rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go." Exit (III.i.147-8). He exaggerates, and he speaks rashly in his rage, and he may not really mean it, but the tragic action bears out his prediction of an end to marriage. All the Danish characters of marriageable age are dead by the end of the play, except for Horatio who is a stranger in Denmark and has never been totally part of the play. Seen from a comedy perspective, some of the deaths are grotesquely funny. Hamlet drags Polonius away and hides him, which is a drastic solution to the problem of the opposition of the senex and a drastic way to clear obstructions to woo Ophelia anew. Then, after Hamlet has escaped the death planned for him by Claudius, attended to by his former school-fellows, the compromise-in-tandem of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he stumbles across Ophelia's funeral; the woman he loves he finds he has lost forever.

In such a submerged play, only three truths are ever brought to light, and the graveyard obsequies reveal two of them:

> **QUEEN** Sweets to the sweet! Farewell.
> [Scatters flowers]
> I hoped thou shoulds't have been my Hamlet's wife.
> I thought thy bride-bed to have decked, sweet maid,
> And not to have strewed thy grave.
> (V.i. 1-4)
>
> **HAMLET** I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers
> Could not with all their quantity of love
> Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her?
> (V.i.257-9)

In spite of Hamlet's hysteria, we believe him. There is no reason for Hamlet to be indirect here; regarding his love for Ophelia, Hamlet is in agreement with his mother, and Polonius, the old fool, was right. Hamlet may have taunted the king with a note announcing his return, but before the graveyard scene the king does not know where he is, so Hamlet disastrously betrays his whereabouts when he expresses his own fury at Laertes' public grief. In Hamlet's pursuit of the truth, a truth solid enough to clear the way for his revenge, he kills the senex whose daughter he loves, finds himself inextricably implicated in his beloved's suicide, and is forced to duel with her aggrieved brother. He has misgivings about this contest arranged by the king, who has tried to kill him once, but no knowledge of what the match will bring. He trusts in the workings of an obscure providence, echoing the passage from Matthew 11:29, "There is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow" (V.ii. 209). He knows "how ill all's here about my heart" (V.ii.203), yet the tragic commitment resides with Hamlet's quiet statement, "The readiness is all" (V.ii. 211), which is similar to Edgar's stoic "Ripeness is all" in King Lear. We can agree with Leavis's assertion that the medium of tragedy makes immortal the possibilities of life, by learning that the value of what is destroyed is brought into sight only by its destruction.[32] DeQuincey has shown us that immortality in a comic context by giving us a sudden glimpse of the unoffending nature of the world transgressed against by murder, while Leavis shows us the obverse side, the substance of what virtues are lost in the tragic commitment and the death of the tragic protagonist.

If we continue to look at Hamlet from the comic perspective, we see that Hamlet's motives for agreeing to the fencing match are mixed; it is an opportunity for reconciliation with Laertes, although his casual dismissal of Polonius's death, "Who does it then? His madness" (V.ii. 226) is easily and hypocritically accepted by Laertes, about what Hamlet expected. The third truth, of course, is Laertes' confession with his dying breath of Claudius' guilt in the plot to kill Hamlet, but not Claudius' own confession of guilt to Hamlet for the death of Hamlet's father. Hamlet by himself clears all misunderstandings at the close of the play, which is perhaps the reason we find the ending so painfully unnecessary and yet so complete. The play has devoted its protagonist and its audience to finding out the truth, to returning the world of Elsinore to the expectations of normal life. If Macbeth expresses the tragedy of power, and Antony and Cleopatra the tragedy of love, Hamlet expresses the falling away of loyalty and love in devotion to power.

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[32] F.R. Leavis, "Tragedy and the Medium," The Common Pursuit, London: Chatto and Windus, 1965, pp. 121-35.

But after all is said, the comic context expresses itself best in the uncomplicated and loyal memory of the grave digger, who has the same devotion, though untortured, to Hamlet's father as Hamlet does. If Hamlet ever finds support for the evidence of his heart that complacency and evil should not co-exist without being questioned, something Rosencrantz and Guildenstern never consider because they never consider themselves, then the grave-digger, by remembering everything, re-establishes the historical, ordinary and desperately needed comic context of life, in its unoffending and mysterious continuity from life to life, when Hamlet most needs it.

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